TILLIE

VIRGINIA FISHER HARRIS

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Tillie

A Love Story

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Virginia Fisher Harris

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ERRATA.

We offer our apologies to the reader for the typographical errors in this book.

On page 18, "intinnabulation" should be "tintinnabulation;" on page 20, "den" should be "don;" on page 51, "from" should be "fro;" on page 68, "woman" should be "women;" etc., etc.

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TILLIE.

I

Blackberries and politicians were ripe. The town candidate was overcome with an intense yearning to "quit the busy haunts of men," to "draw near to nature's heart," to hold sweet communion with her, and the rural voter. The Mecca of his hopes was Brookside, a populous precinct of much political importance—a rustic, collective Warwick.

Although this was an election year, for the once Brookside had relegated politics to a subordinate place in its attention, being absorbed in more local interests. For months, the engrossing thought of the community had been centered upon the building of its school house, and now that the last nail had been driven, it looked with proud satisfaction upon the handsome structure adorning a noble grove—standing, a story in stone, telling the nature of the people who had erected it—reflecting their wealth, culture, and refinement. The day of its completion was a notable one in the community, marking an epoch in its history.

The careless,or indifferent candidate who minimized the importance of this event,found,when the votes were counted, that Brookside precinct had submerged his political aspirations in lethean waves. Hence, the borders of this rural retreat, were invaded by hordes of smiling candidates. The doors of the hospitable country homes stood wide open; the hungering inner man was fed from tables of bounteous plenty; the aromatic mint mingled with the clinking ice in the amber liquid that was offered, and never refused, for the refreshing of the dust-stained, ever thirsty pilgrims, and at all hours of the day,the luscious water melon popped its verdant sides, and offered up its bursting red heart on hospitality's altar.

As fitting climax to the completion of the school house, a great, grand barbecue was determined upon—one to which the whole county would be invited; and even the City would be remembered—as well as the Town—and called upon to contribute its ablest forensic talent, to do honor to the day. Brookside was a unique community—a sequestered fragment from ante bellum days,that the whirlpool of time and progress had failed to sweep away. There, the laws of openhanded hospitality still prevailed; there, neighbor loved neighbor

and friend was true to friend; self had not there become the potent factor of life. In their ancestral homes, many families lived, in a miniatured way, the life their fathers lead, before war's devastating touch had changed the current of Southern ways. Broad, productive acres swept around substantial homes that dotted the hills, or nestled in the wooded valleys. In a restful dale, a little church threw its spire up among the towering trees, its red brick walls rising like a bit of coral in an emerald circlet. From the center of a noble park, the white walls of Creston Lodge rose high above every building in the neighborhood. The passerby always paused a moment before the great iron gates, that opened upon the long avenued shell walk, that lead to the house. Paused, and glimpsed the statues rising white from the green sward; the playful sporting of the gentle deer; the rich coloring of the flowers; and back of it all, the imposing structure with its tall white columns and broad sweep of galleries. Pedestrians rested on the stone steps that led from the gate to the highway, in the shadow of two stately poplars that stood on either side of the gate.

The neighborhood felt pride, unmixed with envy, in this estate. Its owner's fortune had

been made and saved in honor—no tarnished dollar rested in his coffers, and no man stood higher in the affection and esteem of the county than Colonel Allen Creston.

Four generations of the name had Creston Lodge sheltered, though now but three of the name were left: Colonel Creston, his wife and their little son, Allen. Joining the Creston estate lay the Daveril plantation, and when winter winds had stripped the trees of their screening foliage, the houses of each stood well in view of the other. It was in the Daveril home, that lonely little Allen passed his happiest hours. Theodore Daveril was Allen's age, and the two lads of ten were inseparable chums. Elsie Daveril seemed as an elder sister, and Tillie, a little maid of seven, was the idol of Allen's boyish heart.

The four children grew up through an ideally happy childhood. Childhood! Thou phantom-land—where shadows seem real, and illusive virtues giantize the adult rulers of thy kingdom!

Mr. Daveril, having donated the ground upon which the school house stood, the children had a feeling of personal ownership, and there they played through the long warm days, and watched with excited interest, the

building rise, stone by stone. But a strip of wooded lawn and a cornfield, lay between the grounds and the Daveril home, and day by day, the children went to this, to them, earthly paradise. The day the Board met to plan, measure and discuss, and decide, upon the building site, they were there, standing around in listening awe—wide-eyed, and opened-mouthed. The day the first load of sand was hauled, it seemed, to their childish hearts, as if there was no greater happiness left for life to give. Far down in the corner of the grounds under the spreading shade of a great oak tree, they stood watching, with tense breathless interest, the mules pull slowly up the slope, rattling and clanking the chains of the wagon traces; the snake-like writhings of the long leathern whip as it cut, and lashed into the air above the toiling beasts; the high weather-stained boards of the wagon, through which the fine white sand drizzled, leaving a tiny, silvery trail.

"Git up," called out the harsh metallic voice of the driver and the mules tugged and strained up the hill to the level ground.

"I wish he would throw the sand off here, under this big tree, where it is shady, then we could play in it. If he goes up where the men

will be working, they will say we are in the way. Let's ask him to come over here, Elsie?'' and Tillie looked pleadingly up into her sister's face.

"You know he won't do it," scornfully said Ted.

"Oh! look Elsie, he's going on by! Call him to come here," and Tillie's face clouded over. But Elsie, usually so willing to obey her behests, was silent, and Tillie's hitherto ready allies, Ted and Allen, were dumb. Then little Tillie herself, seized the horns of the dilemma and called out coaxingly, with a tremor in her voice, "Mr. Davis!" It was scarce more than a whisper. Then louder: "Mr. Davis!" then imperiously, with gathering courage:

"Mr. Davis, come down here where its cool and shady."

She ran eagerly up to the side of the wagon and looked anxiously into the man's swarthy, sweating face.

"Please throw the sand off under that oak tree so we can play in it!"

He peered at her quizzically from under his bushy brows and said:

"Do you s'pose the Board's havin' this sand hauled for the Daveril chillerns to play in?"

Tillie stood, flipping up the loose pebbles in the dirt, with her bare toes, her curly, tousled gold-glinting brown head thrown saucily back, her blue-gray eyes gazing steadily into the tired man's weather beaten, labor-lined face, her attitude expressing confident impudence.

"I don't care! I want it down there under that big oak tree," defiantly.

Elsie, Ted and Allen stood off in awed amazement, then Ted and Allen began to snicker, but quickly hid their grinning faces behind Elsie's back, not knowing what Mr. Davis in his righteous anger might rise up and do. With a short dry laugh, and a quizzical look from his twinkling eyes, at the defiant, saucy little face, the man gathered up his lines.

"Git up;" a cracking of the lash, a rattling of chains, and the mules pulled on down to the big spreading oak tree.

The moment of suspense and danger being over, Ted and Allen came boldly forward, from behind Elsie, and bravely joined in Tillie's wild whoops, and shouts of delight. When the wagon stopped, Tillie clambered in, and threw her little arms around the man's leathery neck. Her kind, warm, little heart bubbled over with gratitude towards all who

were kind to her, and her democratic nature drew no social lines. When the sand was heaped in a huge, glittering mound, Tillie, with a ringing laugh, and triumphant shout, ran, with the speed of a deer, and jumped deep down in the yielding mass, the boys following clumsily, with less speed, but wilder whoops; Elsie, mindful of the dignity of her eleven years, going after sedately. Then all sat down and built mountains, and forts, and castles, out of the shining sand, peopling them with bright fancies.

Dreamy little maid, playing in the sand,
Building stately castles, lofty and grand,
With turreted towers, and frowning face,
And noble steps, that with sinuous grace,
Sweep to the winding walk that trails its length
Down to wall, and great iron gate, whose strength,
Like some giant's sinewy, certain arm
Guards the frowning castle from foemans harm.

The magic wand that happy childhood wields,
A brilliant troop of stately courtiers yields,
There are fair ladies sweet, in trailing gowns,
And knights and lords, and men with ducal crowns,
And o'er the sand fantastic glamour dwells,
Enmeshing dreamy maid in eerie spells.

Dreamy little maid with unheeding eyes,
Sees not frowning rain clouds, in summer skies.
Down splash rain drops, in angry swirling dips,
And fairy land from little dreamer slips.
Gone—ladies fair, and men with ducal crowns
Ruined—are the castle grand, and spreading grounds;
Sodden sand, the gate that clanged so loud
When opened wide for friendly feudal crowd.
Startled little maid runs, helter skelter,
From drenching rain, to home's friendly shelter.

Life oft is like to playing in the sand,
Where we, too careless, build, and idly plan;
Seeing summer skies in beauty bending;
We think the golden day all unending,
'Till the sky of life in gloom is clouded,
And chilled the heart, in sorrow shrouded:
Then lifting high, its eager anxious gaze,
The soul in yearning, seeks to pierce the haze,
When through the mist, with glow, bright supernal,
There beams the light from Faith's peak eternal.

Across the cornfield comes the wild, clanging notes of the deep mouthed dinner bell. Up jump the children, and brushing the sand from their clothes, they race merrily down the green slope. Then, there is a brief delirious pause in the shallow brook, the little bare feet splashing in the clear rippling water. Then

Tillie, Ted and Allen, stand on the red brown rock that juts, into the brook, and jump with, a dash, and splash, into the cool current, reckless Tillie sits down in the shallow stream, and watching her garments float about her, screams with delight. Another fierce clang of the bell, warns the children it is better to forego present joys, than to "endure ills they know not of," for Mrs. Daveril could wield the rod as energetically as the bell. Down the hot dusty road run the two bare foot boys, kicking up a shower of red dust. Tillie, with wet, dripping garments clinging to her, runs tearfully after them, calling "Wait!" but the heedless boys go on, and Elsie takes the little wet hand in hers and leads the tearful, disconsolate little maid home. At sight of the be-draggled, dust-stained, humbled little figure—but a moment before so proudly defiant, the boys burst into derisive yells.

"Oh my! ain't you a sight," cries Allen.

"Won't you catch it!" cheerfully from Ted. Allen calls out "good bye," and runs swiftly on through the orchard, down the narrow path their childish feet have worn, across the pasture, and through the stretch of woodland home.

When the bricks for the school building were hauled, the boys built doll houses,

churches and stores, Tillie and Elsie taking their dolls over. Tillie's cyclonic touch had left Elsie but two dolls—Mr. and Mrs. Flowery. These, Elsie treasured with precious care. Mrs. Flowery was a silly, frivolous little china-headed doll, and Mr. Flowery, a dapper velvet-clad little bisque. They were very dear to Elsie, and it was with a mournful sigh of resignition, that she permitted dainty, fastidious, aristocratic Mrs. Flowery to associate with Tillie's motly, plebian family of leg-less, arm-less, or hair-less dolls. Often Elsie fancied she saw a look of ineffable scorn sweep over Mrs. Flowery's patrician countenance when thrown into proximity to Tillie's dirty-face rag dolls, with their legs and arms sticking out in awkward, unlady-like manner. But Tillie, like all mothers of unfortunate children was sensitive, and Mrs. Daveril and Elsie could allude to the sorrows, and misfortunes of her family, only in the most delicate, tactful manner—after realizing the futility of their efforts to keep the dolls clothed and whole. Allen and Ted, being thorough democrats, resented Mrs.Flowery's assumption of patrician airs, and made life very miserable and uncertain for her, and carried her through harrowing experiences, mortifying to a re-

fined, sensitive, delicate nature. They buried her deep in the sand pile, and hung her high upon branches of the trees with an unlady-like exposure of limb, very embarrassing. Daily they baptized her in the brook with pomp and solemnity, and the singing of doleful hymns—which was most trying to Mrs. Flowery, she being a High Church-woman. She barely escaped being sealed up in the school house corner-stone, but Tillie's sharp eyes discovered her in time to effect a rescue, for though Mrs. Flowery looked with disdain on Tillie's shabby family, Tillie's little warm, forgiving heart could "do good to those who despitefully" used her.

II

As Sancho Panza said, "God bless the man who invented sleep," so, the pious politician—if any such there be—should ejaculate—Heaven bless the man who invented the barbecue! It is at the barbecue that the oratorical candidate appears at his best, and it is a high tide in his political affairs that may "lead on to fortune and to fame." While the post-prandial speaker may find that his gastronomical feats, have in a measure, impeded the flow of his eloquence, his hearers are less critical, than if he had addressed them before dinner—that being the crowning glory of the barbecue—speeches, music, et cetera—being but pleasing accessories. So, dinner disposed of, a good natured constituency settles itself contentedly, to listen—the speaker's fine rhetorical points blending so hazily and harmoniously in its mind with recollections of Aunt Sallie's pies, and Uncle Joe's roast, that the line of

demarkation between thought and good digestion grows faint.

A hungry listener is a tiger and picks flaws in an argument as a dog gnaws a bone—snarling and snapping. The well fed hearer is like the sheep, and bleats, ba-a, after the orator's peroration—content to accept another's logic as his own. He who speaks before dinner, must consult the face of his watch as well as the face of his audience. The speaker—or preacher—who detains mortal man beyond his dinner hour—though he speaks the words of a Demosthenes with the tongue of an angel, will find that his eloquence becomes "but sounding brass, and tinkling cymbal." He who would waft his audience within sight of celestial visions, or sound of angelic choirs, must return them to earth, in time to catch the intinnabulation of the dinner bell.

The day of the barbecue drew near; all Brookside was stir and bustle. The housekeepers were on their mettle; they had a reputation to maintain—Brookside house-keeping being far famed, even beyond the borders of the county.

Elsie felt her importance, that she was permitted to help her mother and Mammy Letty

with the cake-making and pie-baking. Ted, Tillie and Allen, being denied entrance to the kitchen, hung around the door like hungry puppies, calling out sarcastic jeers and taunts to Elsie, who ignored them in haughty silence. "Oh, my! don't you think you are smart?" sneered Tillie, with up-turned nose, and tossing head.

"You think you're something, don't you?" sarcastically from Ted; while Allen called out, with withering scorn:

"You ain't so many!"

"G'won fum dat do!" Mammy Letty calls out. Tillie sticks her little tousled head in the door, and says in wheedling tones:

"Mammy Letty, please ma'am, let us scrape the bowl, when you pour the batter in the cake-pan."

"G'won fum dat do, I say! I ain't got no time ter fool wid you all. You chilluns ack lak haf starved niggers. "Gwon fum dar I tell you!"

And Mammy Letty would beat the batter vigorously with the great, long, iron spoon.

Ted and Allen snicker, and jump back, but bold little Tillie sneaks in, and giving Mammy Letty's black neck a hug, with one arm slyly slips one dirty little finger in the batter,

which she boldly licks before Mammy Letty's astonished eyes. Ted and Allen, inspired by their leader's bravery, attempt the same feat, but are ignominiously routed by Mammy Letty. After a time, the bowl is set out side the door, and the three children scrape and eat, and smear the white batter over their dirty faces. Then the beligerent Mammy Letty comes out, with a heaping plate of little round, hot cakes.

"G'won dar in the shade, and eat dese; but don't you tell yer ma nuffin 'bout hit, case I dun baked um, unbeknowenst to her, do she den low dat pound cake 'sprise her, long er hit not bein' as big as hit most in general is."

At last the morning of the great day dawns. Judge Brentford, candidate for congress, is to be the orator of the day, and guest of the Daverils. To his son Leslie, a youth of twenty, fresh from college, has been deputed the honor of making a brief talk on "The value of learning," for the benefit of "the young idea" of Brookside, which will soon be "taught to shoot" within the stone walls of the school house. Colonel Creston is to make the opening address, and Mr. Daveril to introduce the speakers.

Mrs. Daveril dare not dress Ted and Tillie for the barbecue, until the last moment—as they are short on thinking, and long on climbing, Tillie, as apt to be found perched on the barn, as in a chair. She had been known to come in from some of her exploits "all tattered and torn" but so tearful, sorrowful and remorseful, so contrite, that soothing caresses and sympathizing kisses, are showered upon her, instead of the spanking she so richly deserved.

Tillie escaped her merited meed of chastisement, through the tearful intercessions of Ted and Allen.

On the morning of the barbecue, Ted and Tillie, with disheveled locks, and soiled garments, strayed down the hot, dusty road, to watch for the coming of the great man. Allen followed, with down-cast head, and slow dragging feet, very miserable and unhappy in his good clothes. Mrs. Creston had permitted him to come over, after he had bound himself by solemn promises, to be very nice and quiet, to sit very still, and look at books and pictures with Ted and Tillie, whom she thought would also be "clothed and in their right minds." Very handsome Allen looked, and Ted and Tillie

admired him very critically, and solemnly, for a while, but when Allen, out of deference to maternal injunctions, continued to back from the approach of their inquisitive dirty fingers, Ted became very much incensed, and stormed out:

"You needn't be so 'fraid of us touchin' you, Allen Creston! we're just as good as you are!"

"I know it Ted, 'taint me, it's the clothes," said Allen, apologetically, almost in tears.

"Well! what you come here in your good clothes for?" indignantly; and Ted flipped up a shower of powdery red dust, that fell over Allen's white suit like a red mist, and half blinded him. Then Tillie, never to be outdone, kicked up more, and Ted, thus encouraged, raised a regular simoon. Allen looked at his ruined clothes, and read between the lines. It meant a whipping, and perhaps worse, banishment from Daveril Dell. He had come over so proudly to show Tillie his new suit, and she had treated him with disdain and ignominy! The iron entered his soul. A thirst for vengeance possessed him. Regardless of clothes and solemn vows, he plunged into the dusty road, and fell upon Ted and beat him. But Ted was up in a

moment, giving blow for blow, while Tillie was biting and scratching Allen, and screaming:

"Let my brother alone!"

In the midst of these sanguinary proceedings, a horse and buggy appeared around the bend of the road. In the buggy were Judge Brentford and his son. Ted and Allen took to their heels, Allen going dejectedly home. Over the meeting between mother and son, the pall of silence drops. After the flight of the boys, Tillie stood for a moment, in the middle of the road, bare legs astride, gazing defiantly at the occupants of the buggy, then with feet and hands, throwing a shower of dust in the horses' face, she fled with the speed of a fawn, down the road, in the gate, around the house, plump into the arms of Mammy Letty, who was searching for her. She bore the dust-smeared Tillie into the bath room, and plunged her into the tub of water, rubbing and scrubbing, regardless of cries of "Soap in my eyes!"

"Big man in de parlor and you kivered wid de dust of de road!" scornfully from Mammy Letty. "What dat man gwine tink uv yer Pa? G'wine size him up fer er little ol' one hoss farmer, stid er big planter!"

Then came the hair brushing, and the last state of that child was worse than the first. The making of Tillie's toilet was always a gloomy occasion. But when she was dressed in her dainty white frock, with a pink sash about her waist, pink bows nestling in her sunny curls, she was as fair, and sweet and dainty a little maid as ever eye rested upon. Mammy Letty, impressed with the dignity and importance of having a great man under the roof, lined the three children up in front of her, while with solemn, mysterious air, she endeavored to impress upon their juvenile minds, the importance of upholding the dignity, of the house of Daveril. Tillie was the recipient of an extra lecture, her demeanor being of an uncertain quality that kept the family in a state of dread and suspense, in the presence of company. Her eyes were very big and serious as she listened to Mammy Letty.

"Elsie, you looks mighty nice and pretty and I knows you's g'wine ter ack lady-like. Ted, yer looks like er little man; now 'have yerself. Now, Tillie, don't yer do nuffin scan'lous. Don't yer skin de cat, er turn summerset, er stan' on yer head 'fore de company, case dats er mighty big man, an you

must be 'spectible. G'won in de parlor now, and 'have yerselves."

The three children walked demurely into the parlor, the gentleman rising at their entrance. Tillie stood bashfully before Judge Brentford, who reached down and took her little hand in his. He looked smilingly into the pretty face, and said, as he drew her up to him:

"Is this pretty little girl the one I saw kicking up dust in the road?"

"Yes; but," looking at him critically with big serious eyes, "you ain't so very big, you ain't as big as Papa; Mammy Letty said you were great big!" measuring with her tiny hands from the floor. Then going shyly up to Leslie Brentford, she gave him her hand. He stooped and looked long and admiringly into the sweet little flower-like face.

"I like you better than him," pointing with fine scorn at Judge Brentford, whose dimensions had disappointed her.

"I like you too, little maid," said Leslie seriously.

Awe and fear being worn off, Ted and Tillie began playing hide and seek, behind Judge Brentford's chair. Ted and Tillie would have played on Mahomet's tomb.

It seemed as if the county had emptied its entire population into the spacious wooded grounds of Brookside school house. The long rows of rough plank seats, ranged before the speakers stand, were filled to crowding, with men, women and children, dressed in their best summer finery. Off to one side were ranged numerous long board tables, about which men and women were busy, arranging a mountain of edibles. About the lemonade stands, country girls in varihued toilets, stood with their best beaux, sipping and simpering.

Seated around tables, under the shade of wide spreading trees, town belles in crisp, cool white gowns, toyed with ices, and the hearts of masculine admirers, who hovered about them. Off in sequestered nooks, seated on rambling grape vines, oblivious of all the world, lovers talked in low murmuring tones. The wheezy jingling notes of a hand organ,rose and fell on the summer air, keeping time with the merry-go-round, as it whirled round, and round, with its load of laughing children.

The band played Dixie. Wild yells rent the air; gloved hands clapped enthusiastically, and dainty handkerchiefs waved and fluttered —affection's unfailing salute to an echo from the deathless past. Bronzed cheek men,

across whose breasts were pinned, empty sleeves, furtively wiped tears away, as the old familiar strains, rose and fell on the soft summer air. Grey haired women felt a choking in the throat,and a tightening about the heart, and tears, unrestrained, rolled down their withered cheeks. When the music ceased, Allen, crowded in between his mother and Tillie, looked up, and saw his father standing on the platform. Tall, erect, handsome, his mien bespoke the gallant chivalrous gentleman, and his face expressed the noble man. As Allen looked into his father's dark, flashing eyes and listened to his earnest words, he felt a thrill shoot through his boyish heart, and pride and affection gushed the warm tears to his eyes, and ambition's first whisper fell upon his mind.

Colonel Creston was followed by Leslie Brentford who rose, with the blush of modesty upon his beardless cheek.

His grey eye swept over the face of his audience, and fell and rested upon a little wild rose face, hedged in between two squirming restless boys. The big,serious,blue-grey eyes looked full into his own. With a faint smile upon his lips, and a quick up-throwing of the head, he drew his tall shapely figure to its full

height. He launched into his speech with a voice slightly quivering from nervous embarrassment, but in a moment, mind controlled the body, and he was master. His words of youthful enthusiasm, thrown out in clear ringing tones, swayed, and held his audience. When he made his bow and stepped back, wiping his brow, men and women crowded around, and shook his hand in friendly congratulation.

"You'll have to look to your laurels, Judge," said Mr. Daveril to the proud father who stood beaming with pride upon his boy.

"When you step out of Congress, Judge Brentford, your son will be ready to step in," said Colonel Creston.

Then came the dinner—a bountiful Southern dinner, in which each matron who had contributed of her culinary skill, tried to excel her neighbor.

Then the genial, laughing, jesting throng ranged itself again, on the hard backless seats, before the speaker's stand. Bursts of melody from the band—then a hush, and little expectant pause—then a storm of applause, as the orator of the day, stood before the waiting audience. A bow—another burst of applause—the sad, wailing strains of

"Home Sweet Home,"—and the day was done.

Mothers lifted their sleeping babes from the warm earth, and pressed them to their breasts, to hush their startled cries. Neighbor turned for a farewell word with neighbor; and old army comrades grasped each other's hand, and spoke one more reminiscent word.

The grounds were a scene of stir, bustle and confusion, and a medley of sound rose upon the air. The pawing of impatient hoofs into the turf; the rattling of chains as refactory mules were being hitched to wagons; a girl's merry laugh; the loud guffaw of the country yokel; the fretful cry of a tired child. Then the dust rose like a mist from the long stretch of road, whence came the heavy rumblings of wagons; the softer rolling of carriages, and buggies; the sharp hoof falls of trotting horses. The shadows of twilight crept through the woods—then silence broken now and then by the sharp, anxious bark of a dog, lost from its master; the distant rumbling of a wagon on a far away hill, and the plaintive call of a lonely whippoorwill. Then—deepened gloom and night fell, over the solemn, silent woods.

III

Many snows have fallen on the hills and valleys. Many times the ice has locked the fretting waters of the little rill in its chill clasp. Many summers have thrown their mantles of green over the sward. Many marriage bells have pealed and chimed. Many funeral trains have swept their solemn lengths over the trailing road, winding in and out the silent wood. Time, with his scythe, has stalked by, and Death with his sickle, followed after, gathering the ripened grain and the tender blade. Colonel Creston, while yet in the flush of his prime, went away,—into the silent Unknown; and his wife, pining for the sound of his voice, and the clasp of his hand, laid aside her cares, and walked down into the shadowed valley, where his face beamed upon her, in the radiance of the real Life.

Allen, in his lonely home, grew to a noble young manhood. Tillie was still the light of

his days; he held her love as the dearest gift in his fortune crowned life,—and his love for her had kept his young manhood sweet and pure. The Daverils had loved, and soothed,and comforted him in the days of his sorrow, and time had, but knit the bonds of friendship closer. Together, he and Theodore had gone to Brookside school, through the early days of boyhood; and together they drank from fuller, deeper founts in college halls. Now in the untrammeled freedom of manhood, they were entered upon halcyon days.

Allen walked down the road, toward the school house, where the young men and women of the neighborhood were merrily busy, decorating the lawn for the nights garden party, to be held in honor of Tillie's return after four months absence in the City.

She had achieved something of a social success there, her beauty, her girlish freshness, her piquant unconventionality charming all who met her. Allen paused a moment on the brink of the little stream, and watched the ripples dash noisely away. In retrospect, he saw Tillie's little white bare feet, resting on the gleaming pebbles in the stream; he saw her garments 'clinging like cerements;' he saw the spray-dashed gold-brown tendrels nest-

ling about the sweet face; the merry saucy eyes seemed to look full into his own. Allen brushed away a tender tear and sat down on the old red brown rock. How great once had seemed this old rock! But now, before maturity's iconoclastic vision, its dimensions seemed to have dwindled away to insignificance. What a feat they had thought it, he, Ted, and Tillie, to stand on its rough surface, and jump with bound and splash into the shallow depths of the cool little stream! Each had tried to excel the other, in the distance jumped, and how their boyish pride—his and Ted's, had been crucified to see Tillie's lithe, supple little body, spring with leopard-like grace far beyond their marks—and how, with boyish scorn of feminine excellence, they had asserted disdainfully, "Pshaw, they could beat that but they were tired." And now, before his mental vision, the hurt look in the sweet eyes; the disappointed tremor of the tender lips, the down-drooping of the tawny head, bent as if to receive the cypress, instead of the wreath of bay it had hoped for—all stood so plainly before him, as to plant a thorn in his heart. And there was Elsie—always Elsie, to soothe the little maid, when Ted and Allen had been

false or fickle. He, to have ever hurt or wounded Tillie! Here Allen arose from the rock, and stretched out his arms as if to clasp a phantom figure to his breast. A voice called his name, and Ted's bright, boyish, face looked from the hillside upon him. He crossed the foot bridge and went up the gentle slope, down which, in childhood he, Ted and Tillie, had raced so merrily. Tillie, fleet of foot, had always reached the goal first, and stood flushed, and laughing and panting, awaiting them. Ted slipped his arm through Allen's—"What's the matter old fellow? you look blue."

"I have been seeing ghosts Ted—ghosts from a dead past—yours, Elsie's, Tillie's and mine. I have been for a little while in shadow land, with four children we will never see again. I have been watching them wade in the brook. I have been seeing a little maid we use to tease———."

"And does that make you grumpy? It makes me laugh. I can see Tillie now, in her dirty dress, and bare feet, kicking up dust in Leslie Brentford's face," and Ted laughed loud and merrily.

"'The loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind,'" quoted the clear bell-like voice, of a

sylph in white, who greeted them at the brow of the hill, and Louie Graham smiled archly upon them. "Allen, come over in the shade of the old oak, and explain why you, the instigator, the prime mover of tonight's festivities, have shirked, and left the work for us to do."

"I, as general, planned the campaign Louie, and left the work for the rank and file." The three walked over to the old oak tree—"Tillie's tree," it had been called, since that memorable day in the long ago, when Tillie had coerced Mr. Davis into unloading the sand there. Elsie was sitting now under its shade, and by her side sat young Doctor Thurston, idly toying with her fan, looking very comfortable and content.

"This is evidently a case of 'two's company,' and it seems unkind to intrude upon so pleasant a tete a tete," said Allen teasingly, as he took Elsie's outstretched hand, and smiled into her happy blushing face.

"Oh," said Louie, sinking down upon a piled heap of cushions and drawing her white draperies aside to make room for Ted beside her, "Elsie's and Doctor Thurston's case is one of such long, prosaic standing, that all

the romance is rubbed off. A crowd doesn't embarrass them at all, the love making goes on just the same."

"If it does, Louie, Doctor Thurston takes the initiative; Elsie doesn't pursue him as you do me," said Ted.

"'The fool fleeth where no man pursueth,'" quoted Louie. "You are chased by your vanity's phantoms."

"The personal tone of this conversation is embarrassing to Elsie and Doctor Thurston. I see they both are blushing very violently," said Allen.

"Doctor Thurston blushing!" said Louie, peering into his face, "Then it must be at the remembrance of the bill he presented to his last patient."

"Doctor Thurston doesn't present bills to his patients—he and the undertaker present them to the family of the dear deceased," said Theodore solemnly.

"'Dead men tell no tales,'" added Allen, lugubriously.

"Doctor Thurston," said Elsie, laughing, "their youth is sufficient apology for their impertinence. Remember, these silly boys are but twenty-one, and tender and fresh."

"I have been puzzling over a question of cause and effect;" said Theodore, reflectively. "I want to know whether the increased mortality of Brookside is due to Doctor Thurston's presence—or Doctor Thurston's presence is due to the increased mortality."

"That is an abstruse, debatable question, Theodore," laughed Doctor Thurston, "one you might submit to Leslie Brentford's logical mind for elucidation. I hear he is to be here tonight, and he is supposed to know all things knowable."

"Don't fling any sarcasms at Mr. Brentford, Doctor Thurston. I have been holding him up as a model to these two lazy, idling boys, who do nothing but hunt, fish, and dream the golden days of youth away," said Elsie. "True, he is nine or ten years their senior, but see what he has accomplished! A character that no one impugns—a high standing at the bar, and a fair promise of going to congress in a few years. I remember the day he made his maiden speech, here on these very grounds, and I remember that our elders then, predicted, there was a future for Leslie Brentford."

"Oh, you sluggards," said Louie pointing her finger at Allen and Ted, "'go to the ant and be wise!' And you, Allen, furl your con-

quered banner. You have no chance with such a 'Richmond in the field.' He is the man of the hour; and 'they say'—that unbiquitous, elusive elf—that he is wild about Tillie, and swears by the great horn spoon, to have her, or Allen's 'heart's blu-u-ud,' " tragically, with her saucy laughing blue eyes fixed on Allen's dark frowning face. "Scared Allen? He will be here to night, and what a romantic termination to the evening's festivities would be a duel by moonlight."

"Sacrifice yourself, Allen, do," said Ted, "Brookside is so horribly, desperately, virtuous, there is never a sensation,"

"And now is your opportunity to enroll your name on Fame's scroll, Allen—embrace it," said Louie.

"Pardon me if I seem disobliging by declining to pass into history as the Brookside sensation," answered Allen smiling.

Reflectively and meekly from Ted.

"Louie, I'd rather embrace you, than an opportunity."

"Goose! What prevents? I'm sure the company will retire if you are bashful."

"On second thought, I won't, Louie, you being the antithesis of 'opportunity,' which is golden."

"Then, if 'like, seeks like,' I must be thine affinity, oh youth with brazen cheek."

"I shall be glad to renew my acquaintance with Mr. Brentford," said Elsie, irrelevantly. "He has been so kind to Tillie during her visit to the City. I am so pleased that he is coming tonight."

"Yes, I am glad too,"said Allen. "He is a fine fellow. I hope he will stay in the neighborhood long enough to enable me to return some of the many courtesies he has shown me during my trips to the city. I wrote, and invited him to be my guest on this occasion, but he had promised to stop with relatives."

"Be on your guard Allen. Tillie may weigh the 'village swain' in the balance, and find him wanting, against Leslie Brentford and a long line of suitors. Tillie has had a taste of power, and a glimpse of the gay world. The little rustic maid, simple and unspoiled, who left us a few months ago, may find Brookside's charms tame and dull when she returns. But if this gorgeous scene" with a sweep of the hand toward the lawn "doesn't over-power her, we will send her back to the City to be courted and flattered a month longer, and my sweet, self-sacrificing spirit will

impel me to go with her, to share her honors and beaux."

"Go, Louie, go! With tears in my eyes, I implore you! There are compensations in every lot, and we can endure Tillie's absence if it removes your frivolous presence from our serious midst."

A toss of the blonde head—a curl of the pouting red lips and a glance from half closed eyes, was the only answer Louie vouchsafed Theodore.

"Elsie, Tillie reached Town, yesterday, didn't she?" asked Louie.

"Yes, and I believe Allen drives in for her this afternoon. Isn't that the arrangement, Allen?"

"Yes, and I must be going now. But Black Lee will trot the seven miles in very few minutes, and I'll have Tillie home in time for her beauty nap this afternoon, before the grand fete begins," smiling. Ted looked at Allen's bright happy face and said:

"Everybody happy but me! Boo-hoo!" then began to sing "No one to love, none to carress," in doleful harrowing tones.

"What's the matter with me?" asked Louie, slangily, rising and sweeping him a low courtesy.

Placing his hand upon his heart, and bowing low, Ted replied.

"Small favors thankfully received."

"Ingrate! To wound my tender trusting heart with irony's darts!"

"Don't know about your heart being tender Louie. It seems rather tough and sinewy, but we all admit the tenderness of your brain. Come Elsie, Louie, all of you, it is time to go home and rest from our labors."

IV

Black Lee, with swift high stepping strides, cut the wind like a knife, and the buggy bowled rapidly along the smooth hard road. Tillie threw back her head, and drank in the fresh fragrant country air with deep soughing breath. The wind tossed her hair in fluffing disorder about her face; the glow deepened in the rounded cheeks, the bright expressive eyes sparkled with the delight, and the whole face glowed with health and happiness, and the exuberant joy of living.

"Oh the dear country, how I love it!"

Allen smiled tenderly into her face.

"Tillie it is sweet to hear you say that. I have been troubled with many forebodings during the long lonely days that you were away. I know how you love brightness and gaiety—how you enjoy the excitement of city life, and I have feared Tillie, you might come home, only to find the country insup-

portably dull and monotonous. And Tillie—how that would hurt me. For dear as Creston Lodge is to me—my very heart strings seem twined about it—yet your happiness is dearer."

"Allen, Creston Lodge is as dear to me, as to you. I love every stone in its walls; every gnarled old tree, the flowers, the winding walks—but most of all I love the memories that cluster about it. Your father was my childhood's hero. My sole ambition for you, Allen, is that you may be the worthy son of a noble sire; that you may be the courtly honored country gentleman, as was he; that you may maintain Creston Lodge in the dignity of its traditions; and that the name that has come to you, untarnished, through an honored ancestry, may lose none of its lustre, now that you bear it alone—the last of your line and race. I think Allen, that your father must have had a premonition that you would soon be left alone, for though I was but a slip of a girl, in those last days, he talked much to me of you. He spoke of his hopes and plans—your noble qualities, and your weaknesses—ee'n those 'failings that lean to vir-

tue's side'—your generous, trusting impulsive nature, and would often say, 'Tillie, Allen is in your keeping.' "

"He loved you so Tillie. It was a pleasant thought to him that one day you would be the mistress of Creston Lodge, for though I was barely fourteen when he died, it seemed quite settled with us all, that you and I would marry when we were grown."

Tillie blushed rosily, and Allen smiled into her face and continued:

"I remember well, the day I arrived at the dignity of my first trousers—with what scorn I looked upon the discarded kilts!—My father took me in his lap, and looking very seriously into my face, asked:

'What are you going to do when you are a man Allen?'

'Marry Tillie,' I answered with solemn promptness.

And Tillie, that boyish ambition has gone through life—every other aspiration is submerged in that one crowning hope. We have overcome the one obstacle—youth. Are there any other objections to be urged?"

"Propinquity," answered Tillie, smiling. "Our elders say, that, since we have grown

up together, our affection may be but the result of propinquity,—and has not been fairly tested."

"Tillie you know better than that?" asked Allen in a hurt tone.

"Yes, and so will they; but we all are so happy, we can afford to drift along as we are, yet a while longer."

"I have truly been between Scylla and Charybdis, the past four months. At home, I missed you so desperately, I must fly to the City; there, to stand like a Tantalus—seeing you. hearing you, but always in a crowd—never a moment alone—jostled aside by the admirers with their 'previous engagements.' I tell you it was hard on a fellow, Tillie, and I am glad to have you again, all to myself."

"Every one was kind, Allen, so kind, to rustic little me, and this season in the City will always be a rose-hued remembrance."

"Kind! I should think so—some too kind. Leslie Brentford 'had been kinder, had he been unkind."

"No, indeed, Allen. My modicum of popularity was due to his friendship and influence. But for Mr. Brentford, I had returned 'unhonored and unsung.' There are several striking points of resemblance between society

men and sheep—both move in flocks, both are dependent on a leader—and a sheep I believe is considered the most stupid of quadrupeds. To the biped—nature has given feet for dancing, hands for card-playing, lips for smiles and flatteries, forms for tailor's exhibits. The trifling matter of brain is furnished by the leader, whom the busy little flock selects, and their allegiance to him is like unto that of Ruth's to her mother-in-law,—queer girl.—Whither he goes, they go; his people become their people—his gods—mammon and society—theirs. In the City, Leslie Brentford is this social potentate."

"I thought he worshiped at ambition's shrine?" asked Allen.

"Yes, but he was born within society's pale, and has lisped its shibboleth from infancy, hence he holds to its traditions. You know Allen, my aunt lives quietly, unostentatiously. During the first week of my visit, Mr. Brentford was absent from the city. I felt myself an Arctic explorer—and every society man a glacier."

"The snobs," interrupted Allen.

"In return to my little bow, they would give me a haughty stare, glance furtively around the street, then barely touch their

hands to their hats. Later, as evidence of my social progress, the staring eyes became cognizant of my presence, and the hat was slightly, very slightly—it wouldn't do to run risks—lifted from the head. But, when King Cophetua returned and smiled upon the beggar maid—presto! change! Off came the hats, high in air, with out-ward sweep—deep bows and smiles, and Miss Daveril became quite the fashion. 'What fools we mortals be.' But Allen, I must confess," and Tillie smiled archly into his face, "that it was an immense satisfaction to see several of those glaciers quite melted before I left, and in reply to pertinent questions, tell them, there is 'an early attachment.' But ah, there is Brookside."

The tall grey chimneys of Creston Lodge rose above the tree tops; the red roof of Daveril Dell tinted the foilage, and the lofty spire of Brookside school house cleft the sky-line.

Tillie didn't get her beauty nap that afternoon, the pleasure and excitement of being home keeping her very wide awake. She roamed about the place with smiles and greet-

ings for all. To the stable to see the horses; to the kitchen to chat with Mammy Letty; then to the long cool gallery, where with a happy little sigh—she sank on a low seat, between her father and mother. But she arose quickly, with dignity, when William appeared very polite and obsequious, bearing fruits and flowers.

"With Mr. Allen's compliments, Miss Tillie."

Secretly, Tillie stood much in awe of William, a grey-haired old negro—a Chesterfield, suave and dignified, with courtly bearing, and educated beyond his fellows.

Tillie felt that her unconventional manner must shock his sense of propriety, and idea of what the future mistress of Creston Lodge should be. William was born a slave on the Creston estate, and his devotion to the place, and to Allen, was intense.

About the tea table, the Daverils and their guests were gathered—Louie Graham, Doctor Thurston and Allen.

"Why isn't Leslie Brentford with us tonight; where is he stopping?" asked Mr. Daveril.

"With his cousins, the Peytons," answered Louie.

"Dear, delightful Louie," said Tillie, "she knows everything about everybody."

"How do you suppose I would exist in this stupid place, if it were not for gossip?

> Gossip! Of 'woman's life a part,'
> Gossip! The life blood of man's heart."

"Hold, woman!" cried Theodore, with tragic gesture, rising, "I have endured your irony, your ridicule, your silly chatter, your brainless vaporings, but this is too, too much!" and Ted sank exhausted into his chair. "Your poetry is the camel that breaks the straw's back."

"May be it is the camel that couldn't go through the eye of a needle," said Doctor Thurston.

"I see no connection between needles and Louie's poetry," said Allen, "a needle is sharp, a needle has a point, and Louie's poetry is neither sharp nor pointed."

"You malign Louie's poetic effusion. A needle can sew, sew, and Louie's poetry is 'so, so,'" said Elsie, teasingly.

"'Et tu Brute'—and this from Elsie! 'Now let loose the dogs of war! Oh, ye gods! Ye gods! must I endure all this?'" with tragic upthrowing of hands.

"'All this? Ay more: Fret till your proud heart break,'" replied Ted.

"Mrs. Daveril, I think this is a conspiracy to divert my attention from your lovely supper—but I shall foil these base conspirators by keeping silence, and eating."

But in a moment Louie laid down her knife and fork and said in tragic tones:

"Tillie, they will be out tonight love. The halt, the maimed, the blind, will be out at the garden party. They will be carried there in chairs, on cots, on crutches. They will go in oxcarts, mule wagons, and on foot, with their shoes in their hands. And over all the moon will shed its soft weird light. Oh, we've done it up in style Tillie! And it was all the brilliant idea of Ted and Allen."

"What! Ted and Allen have an idea! My brain refutes the thought," replied Tillie.

"Yes they had an idea, but you see it took the two brains to evolve one thought, and the invitation list shows the nature of their grey matter. They said you would be disappointed and wounded if any of your friends, no matter how humble, were left out."

"Dear boys," and Tillie smiled fondly upon them.

"So," continued Louie, "there will be no vacant chair tonight. Old Mrs. Jones was invited because she has rheumatism; Mrs.

Smith because she has seen better days, and is sensitive; Mrs. Brown because the twins had measles last winter and kept her confined at home; old Mr. Black because he has gout and is very cross. So on down the list; it will be more like a political rally than a garden party; and were the idea conceived by others than Ted and Allen, I would say they were seeking office—but I know they are not quite so dead to shame as to impose themselves upon an intelligent constituency."

"The hour draws nigh. We must hie us to the festive scene," said Ted as they arose from the table.

V

Allen and Tillie stood a moment apart from the crowd. Tillie's glance passed over the brilliantly lighted lawn—her gaze roved from group to group, that passed merrily to and from. Allen's handsome face glowed with love and pride, as his eyes, with a look of fond proprietorship in their dark depths, rested upon the beautiful girl at his side. Tillie's sheer white draperies fell in graceful sweep about her lissome form; a pink rose nestled in the soft tendrils that clustered about her broad white brow; dimples peeped in and out the rounded cheeks, red as the rose, blushing under the dew's soft kiss—the eyes, sweet and tender, glowed and sparkled like stars. Tillie, looking up, caught Allen's intent gaze, and smiled and blushed.

"Allen, the whole county seems to be here. Louie's nonsense seems to have been built upon fact, for I see faces here I haven't seen before, since I was a child."

"Yes Tillie, it is a neighborhood gathering."

"Come Allen, let us go and shake hands with all of our old friends, before we are lost in the reveling throng."

They made the circuit of the grounds, going from group to group, seeking those on the outskirts, where timid fathers and mothers with bashful children about their knees, sat in silence. Everywhere faces brightened at her coming. Old women held her soft, white hands, sparkling with gems, affectionately in their hard, wrinkled ones, saying:

"The same little Tillie—only taller and prettier—but the same kind heart," gazing admiringly at the beautiful, elegant girl.

"And this is Colonel Creston's boy," the men would say. "You make a likely pair," unmindful of the fierce blushes rioting in Allen's and Tillie's faces. "Be the man your father was, Allen, and the county will be proud of you."

From friend to friend they passed, Tillie with smiles and handclasps, and friendly inquiries for all, answering their many questions with simple frankness, and telling pleasing bits of gossip. As she passed on her way, with friendly parting word, and kindly, smiling backward glance, the smiles lingered on the

tired, worn faces, and a brighter light shone in their eyes. The magic of her presence broke the stolid silence, and neighbors gathered together and indulged in friendly chat and laughter, as they watched the kaliedoscopic scene before them, and listened to the soft, sweet strains of the music.

"What an admirable wife for a politician you would make, Miss Daveril," and the clear, deep tones of Leslie Brentford's voice told Tillie of his presence.

A look of hurt indignation passed over Tillie's mobile face, as she replied, holding out her hand in greeting:

"Mr. Brentford," with a reproving inflection, "these are my life-long friends, and I am genuinely glad to see them. Verily, the political virus is deep sunken, that your vision distorts a plump, smiling, rustic maid into 'a lean and hungry Cassius' with ends to further."

"Pray, Miss Daveril," replied Leslie Brentford, after exchanging greetings with Allen, "do not misconstrue my words; they were meant to be complimentary, but I expressed myself awkwardly. You have the tact, and kindly spirit that render scheming duplicity unnecessary. You win the masses by sheer kindness of heart."

"Ah, that compliment quite atones for the insinuation of a moment ago," replied Tillie, smiling.

They walked slowly along, Allen and Tillie pausing to introduce Mr. Brentford to their friends whom they met in the passing crowd; then they went on down to the old oak tree, which vied with the dancing pavilion, and the school house, in fantastic glitter of lights.

Louie Graham, a vision of dainty blonde loveliness, met them with outstretched hands, "Welcome! queen of Love and Beauty, to this most royal court of honor;" with a graceful sweep of the hand around the gaudily decorated space.

"Court of honor! Isn't the grandiloquent name redolent of Louie," laughed Tillie. "Look, scorner, and tell me if this scene does not dazzle and bewilder you. Look upon this grand old oak above us, sparkling, glittering, scintillating with myriad—myriad—"

"Tallow candles," anti-climaxed Ted, solemnly.

"Twinkling lights," continued Louie, unabashed. "Look upon these downy cushions, in rich profusion spread—"

"Upon a carpet red," finished Ted, poetically inclined.

"Look upon these restful couches, these—"

"Hide-bottom chairs, and sit down in one if you want to," invited Ted, hospitably.

"Tillie," continued Louie, "the beauty and chivalry—"

"And gouty Mr. Black," supplemented Ted.

"Mr. Brentford," said Louie with an air of resignation, "you will observe that Mr. Daveril has the fault, common to all young boys, of interrupting their superiors."

"Say elders, Louie," said Ted, but he colored hotly, for he and Allen, like David Copperfield, "felt very young," in Leslie Brentford's presence.

Then Louie proceeded, rhapsodically:

"To think, we have known Tillie all our lives; that we went to school with her—played dolls with her—waded in the brook with her; pushed her off of our back steps, and told her to take her old shabby dolls home, and stay there; that my ma did not want nice, little, lady-like me, to play with her, no how—for she wasn't anything but a little old tomboy. To think that I once said those things to her, whom the city has discovered is the beautiful Miss Daveril of Blank county, oh—"

"Ladies and gentlemen, pray be seated; standing will be tiresome, for Miss Graham is wound up in one of her interminable—I use the word out of deference to the presence of ladies—a stronger, more emphatic one is in my mind—flights of oratory. Mark Antony was not a circumstance to her."

"Now, Ted, you've made me forget what I wanted to say," pouted Louie.

"Thank Heaven," piously from Ted and similar approving expressions from all.

"Mr. Brentford," asked Louie, "what most impresses you here tonight in our crude attempt at artistic decoration?"

"The titles—I haven't met a man here who isn't a general, a colonel or a captain. I thought I must have entered a military post, by mistake."

"There is not a private in Brookside," said Allen. "Such an one would be ostracised."

"Breathes there a Southern man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said—"

"But as for me give me death, or give me a title," paraphrased Theodore.

"Joking aside, Miss Graham, this is like a glimpse of fairy land. Brookside has always been a 'sweet Auburn' of lavendered memories with me. I have known from my youth

up, that it excels in whatever it undertakes," said Leslie Brentford.

"Say, Tillie," said Ted, turning to his sister who stood talking with Allen, Doctor Thurston and Elsie, "we struck a snag when we got to the dancing pavilion."

"The dancing pavilion is very much in evidence," answered Tillie.

"Yes, steered over the shoals by a Richelieu in a tailor-made gown."

"The plot thickens! 'Scheherazade, I pray you make an end of your story," quoted Tillie.

"When Allen and I laid our plans for this garden party before the school board, we got gracious permission to proceed, from all, save Deacon Tranby. When we mentioned a pavilion for dancing, a string band from the city—no wheezy, squeezy, town instrument of torture for Brookside—the old gentleman drawled out, with a nasal twang:

'No, Theodore, I kaint set my official seal of approval on no such pernicious practices. Satan's rampant in these parts, naow.' "

"Oh, Ted, don't make light of religious matters," said Elsie very seriously.

"Religious matters! Do you call Deacon Tranby religious matters?"

"You wouldn't Elsie, if you once traded horses with him," said Allen.

"Well, Tillie, when we saw that we couldn't move the old fellow—from the ark of our hopes we sent a dove—"

"Louie?" asked Tillie.

"Louie? Louie was the brand the Deacon hoped to snatch from the fire, so Louie Graham was carefully kept in the background, during our diplomatic relations with the Deacon. In our first interview with him, we told him that it would be impossible for Miss Graham to attend the garden party, that Doctor Thurston said she had bronchitis, meningitis, dipsomania, kleptomania—"

"And slap-him mania!" exclaimed Louie, but Ted ducked his curly head in time to avoid the blow.

"So, Tillie, we sent the gentle Elsie. The Deacon had always professed an admiration for Elsie because she is so 'different from that t'other Daveril ga'url;' but Elsie went over to the enemy's camp; she returned, a traitor, with tears in her eyes, saying the Deacon was right, and we were wrong—he had a duty to perform; and then we sent—"

"A raven," said Louie.

"No; a bird of Paradise!" said Allen enthusiastically.

"Mrs. Barbee"—added Theodore, melodramatically, "And she returned with her shield, but not with a hail-to-the-chief air--"

"Oh no," interrupted Louie, "she came back as meek as a cooing dove, and made these two silly boys feel that the victory was won solely through their diplomatic skill."

"Anyway," said Ted, "there stands the result—that brilliantly lighted pavilion, whereon are dancing city, town and country beaux and belles."

"But I don't know how she won the old fellow over," said Allen musingly.

"Well I do," said Louie, emphatically. "She dressed herself in her most fetching gown—she went to the Deacon with those great, lustrous brown eyes swimming in crystal seas—she let one little jeweled hand gently grasp the lapel of his old jeans coat—she told him that they—he and she—must be very patient and tender with the faults of the young—that many a straying lamb had been saved by kindly indulgence—that she verily believed that if those two hardened wretches—Allen Creston and Theodore Daveril—were tenderly dealt with, that they might yet be brought to see the error

of their ways. That even she, in her opulent days of the past, had danced, and even now she felt that if for a fleeting moment, she might forget her sorrows in the mazy whirl; life might be for a moment, a 'grand sweet song'—that latter, to prepare him for seeing her dancing tonight. Before her wiles and blandishments, the Deacon slunk away, and the Man, answered—yes! Magnetism is a gift of the gods; but though heaven-sent, 'tis not always heaven-bent."

"You must have eavesdropped, Louie," said Ted.

But Leslie Brentford answered for her.

"A deductive mind finds evidence in intangible trifles; a slap in the face from cold, hard facts is needed only by the obtuse."

"Who is Mrs. Barbee?" asked Tillie.

"A charming accession to the neighborhood," answered Allen.

"Colonel and Mrs. Barbee are city people, who have recently moved to a farm that he owns, in the neighborhood; I understand that it is all that is left him of a once very fine fortune," said Elsie.

"And it, in its present condition wouldn't pasture a goat—the farm, not the fortune—I mean," added Ted.

"Mrs. Barbee is his second wife, and a very charming, attractive woman," continued Elsie.

Tillie turned to Louie.

"Louie, who is that beautiful young creature—that divinity in primrose, meshed in glittering gauze—coming this way? Surely she is not a Brookside product."

"That is Mrs. Barbee."

"The wave of destitution that stranded her on this benighted spot, seems to have swept a trunk of pretty clothes and jewels in with her."

A dark, beautiful face was smiling into Tillie's, and a soft, low voice was saying:

"So this is Miss Daveril! How charmed we are to have you home again! It has been so lonely for Mr. Creston, but Colonel Barbee and I have cheered him all we could. Miss Daveril, this is Colonel Barbee," and a tall, grey mustached man was bowing with pompous dignity before Tillie and telling her how charmed he was to know her. Mrs. Barbee swept her trailing draperies with slow grace, over where Leslie Brentford stood—holding out her little jeweled hand, her dark eyes glowing upon him.

"Ah, Mr. Brentford! You are like a breath from 'mine own native heath.' Tell me the

news of the city. We are out of the world here Mr. Brentford, but its roar reaches us and we hear great things of you. We are watching your career with great interest. It is gratifying to see the honest man crowd out the demagogue, in politics, Mr. Brentford—the country stands in need of statesmen—among such, in time, I am sure you will be numbered." Then turning to Allen and Theodore and smiling into their beaming faces, "Ah, our young Ward McAlisters, your initial function is a grand, brilliant success! The lawn-party reflects credit upon the two who planned and managed it. Ah, that divine music! Yes, Mr. Daveril, I remember that my first waltz was promised to you———"

VI

"Tillie, you haven't seen my new horse," said Allen the day after the garden party. He and Tillie stood chatting on the step.

"Can't you, Elsie and Ted walk over with me now, to see her?"

"I suppose so. Louie Graham and Mr. Brentford are in the sitting-room, but I'm quite sure they will be pleased to go. Come in, and we will see."

After greetings were exchanged, Allen announced the purpose of his call, all according an eager acceptance of the invitation.

"Come, we will go this nearer way," and Tillie and Allen led on through the orchard, Elsie and Leslie Brentford following, Ted and Louie bringing up the rear.

"We are the rear guard of the army," quoted Ted in stentorian tones.

"Don't be so noisy, Teddie boy," called back Tillie, "we all know that if you were anywhere in an army, it would be in the rear."

"And I so tenderly reared."

Deep groans from all.

"Your jeers affect me not," continued Ted, "for I have that within me which lifts me above the darts of envy, for 'my mind a kingdom is.'"

"Limited monarchy, Teddy?" asked Louie.

"Ted, you must be compiling a book of familiar quotations," said Allen.

"That 'mine own familiar friend' would join in the rabble against me."

When they entered the paddock, a groom came forward leading a beautiful bay mare, who walked with high, haughty steps, and poised her head proudly, as if conscious of the blue blood flowing in her veins.

"Oh, what a beauty!" cried Tillie, patting the restive creature's velvety arched neck.

All admired and petted the beautiful animal, who tossed her head proudly and impatiently in response to each caress.

"Mr. Creston has a fine stable of horses. Mr. Brentford, I would like you to see them."

"Certainly, Ted, take Mr. Brentford and the ladies through; I will join you in a moment. Go with Mr. Daveril, Joe," taking the bridle from the groom's hand.

Allen stood holding the bridle in one hand, the other arm thrown over the horse's neck. Tillie patted the tossing head.

"Oh, you dear creature!"

"Do you mean me, or the horse, Tillie?"

"Both," laughing and blushing.

"She is to be your's, Tillie," looking tenderly into the sweet, upturned face.

"Mine? Oh, thank you, Allen."

"She is not yet quite gentle enough for a lady to mount, but will be soon, then I will send her over to you, unless," slowly and earnestly looking into her eyes, "you will come to us? Tillie, I am so lonely in this big house without you."

"Not yet Allen, perhaps later. We are so happy as we are," with downcast eyes, and deepened color, "and we are so young."

"Y-e-s," dubiously, "we are happy, but don't you think the lion's share of happiness is your's, Tillie, and mine but a meagre part? You have your family, hosts of admirers and friends, and my unswerving love, while I have but the hope of winning you. I am on the 'ragged edge of suspense.' Sometimes, I fear that sought after as you are, your love may fail me," with earnest, questioning look.

Tillie met his gaze frankly, seriously.

"Allen, I have loved you all my life. I can not picture my life apart from you, so why question my faith? The surface of my nature is rippled by the admiration of others, but its depths respond only to your heart beats; Allen, dear Allen!"

The tears came into her eyes, and his, and both looked silently, intently with love unspeakable into each other's face. He clasped the little white jeweled hand, resting so lightly on the horse's neck, and looked with intense yearning love into the fair, sweet, serious face. His little merry, saucy Tillie!—this mood seemed foreign to her bright gay nature.

"Tillie, sweet Tillie," with a sigh he tore his gaze from her face. The horse grew restive and pawed the grassy sod with high uprisings of the feet.

"And you like her, Tillie?" patting the mare gently.

"Oh yes, she is perfect. What is her name?"

"Sweetheart; named for you—but there is but one Tillie in all the world for me—the name is too sacred to give to another. Tired, Sweetheart? Well, you shall go," throwing the bridle over the mare's neck and giving her a slap, and she bounded away with a snort, nd shake of head and mane.

The party came up from the stable and Ted called out:

"Allen, we excuse you. We didn't miss you at all. William came in and assisted Joe in doing the honors of the stable most graciously. William's courtly dignified manner awed even Louie Graham into good behavior."

"Then my absence accomplished what my presence would have failed in."

"Doubtless your presence elsewhere accomplished much, Mr. Creston," said Leslie, with a meaning smile and glance at Tillie, who blushed furiously.

"Not quite all I had hoped for, Mr. Brentford," with dignity.

They walked slowly back to the house, and took seats on the long, cool gallery.

William came out bearing a silver tray with wine, cake and fruit.

"Ah, William, this is refreshing," said Ted, clinking the ice in the fragile crystal glass. "'Many have done nobly, but thou excellest them all.'

'Nature form'd but one such man,
And broke the die—in moulding—'

William!"

The last word was brought out loudly, but William was not to be startled from his accus-

tomed serenity, and smiled benignantly, condescendingly on Ted.

"Oh, Allen, 'a horse, a horse,'—and what is of less consequence, a woman—at your bachelor gates," and Ted peered down the avenued walk. "I retract my words; in this instance the woman is of more consequence than the horse, for it is Mrs. Barbee."

Allen arose and went to the gate. Mrs. Barbee placed her hand in his and sprang lightly to the ground. The group on the gallery watched them as they came slowly up the long white walk. Mrs. Barbee, in perfectly fitting riding habit, moved with slow, easy grace, holding Allen's rapt attention by her conversation and magnetic presence.

"Tillie, he has forgotten you," said Louie in a loud whisper.

"Hush, Iago," said Ted.

Tillie made no answer, but her red lips curved in a little smile.

"What a stunner she is!" said Ted.

Leslie Brentford gazed critically at Mrs. Barbee, as if studying her, saying:

"She is one of the most irresistibly attractive woman I ever met. It is a pity she has so circumscribed a field as Brookside."

"Her admirers atone by their ardor, for the limitations of her field," answered Louie. "Ted and Allen have eyes and ears for no one when she is about."

"Louie, jealousy ill becomes a woman," retorted Ted, with mock dignity.

Tillie sat silent, listening to the conversation, and watching Allen and Mrs. Barbee as they came slowly up the walk. An unexplainable chill touched her gay spirits, and a shadow flitted across her face.

Leslie Brentford bent a yearning, tense look upon her face for one moment, then with a sigh, turned his head away. Tillie felt the look and heard the sigh, and a faint pink flush swept over her face.

"You look sad, Miss Daveril."

"I? That is but your fancy."

Here Allen and Mrs. Barbee came up the steps; the gentlemen arose, Mr. Brentford greeting her with quiet dignity, Ted with effusive cordiality, and the ladies meeting her outstretched hand, and smile, with answering ones.

"How lovely to meet you all here! Colonel Barbee regretted that he had not the time to come with me. The Colonel and I have been holding a family council—we think it proper

Brookside should show its appreciation of Mr. Brentford's presence, and I came over to notify Mr. Creston and Mr. Daveril of their appointment as 'ways and means' committee, to devise some plan of entertainment."

"I appreciate the thought, Mrs. Barbee, I assure you, but don't, pray, give yourselves any trouble on my account."

"It will be a pleasure, Mr. Brentford, to entertain in your honor. Whenever a social dilemma confronts me, Miss Daveril, I always consult your brother and Mr. Creston," turning her dark smiling face toward Tillie, "and they unfailingly straighten the tangle."

"Glad to hear that Allen and Ted have become such social experts," answered Tillie simply.

"Wish Ted would straighten out his own kinks," laughed Louie, but Theodore had no answering smile or word, his gaze being riveted upon Mrs. Barbee's attractive face.

"The candle and the moth," murmured Leslie Brentford, in low tones to Tillie, smiling at the boy's look of rapt admiration, but Tillie frowned and bit her lip.

"Mr. Creston being free from family ties is more master of his time, so I bring my social perplexities to him."

"Why not take them to your husband, Mrs. Barbee?" asked Tillie with directness.

Leslie Brentford placed his hands upon his lips to hide a covert smile, as a momentary shade of embarrassment fell upon Mrs. Barbee's face.

"Oh, Miss Daveril, Colonel Barbee is so immersed in business and his books; he leaves social matters to me."

"How unfortunate," replied honest Tillie, "that your tastes are not congenial."

Mrs. Barbee smiled benignantly into the fresh girlish face, then turned to Allen.

"What do you suggest, Mr. Creston, in the nature of an entertainment? Wouldn't Mr. Brentford enjoy a picnic, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes, a picnic!" said Ted rising, "let it be a picnic by all means. Lemon pies—bugs—ants—and other rural delights to charm, shall be spread for Mr. Brentford's effete taste."

After much discussion the picnic was decided upon. As Mrs. Barbee rose to take her leave Ted remarked:

"You came just too late to see Allen's new horse, Sweetheart."

"You audacious boy!" laughing.

"Oh, the horse is named Sweetheart."

"Perhaps Mr. Creston will yet let me see his horse?"

"Certainly," and excusing himself to his guests, Allen walked off with Mrs. Barbee.

"Well, I call that cool," disappointedly from Ted, who had hoped to be deputed Mrs. Barbee's escort to the stable.

"Miss Daveril, you are enough at home here to show me about the grounds, are you not?" asked Leslie Brentford.

Tillie arose with alacrity.

"I shall be glad to."

Their eyes followed Allen and Mrs. Barbee, walking slowly across the lawn.

"Miss Daveril," answering Tillie's unspoken trend of thought, "there are some women who affect men like champagne; their presence exhilarates and fascinates—but 'tis not love, for love is constant and abiding—and a revulsion of feeling follows when 'reason regains her throne.'"

Tillie gave no answer. Her lips quivered.

That Allen could leave her for another—and she home but a day, after four month's absence, Allen! who in all her eighteen years of life had never been content to be away from her.

"Miss Daveril, when you are older, you will have learned that man's master passion is vanity, and through it a woman of the world can play upon the chords of his nature as the harper upon the harp." Then with sudden change of manner.

"This is a very fine old place. I suppose you are already quite fond of it."

"Yes," simply, "I have loved this place from my childhood. It seems woven into the web of my life. Colonel Creston was a grand man—my ambition for Allen is that he may be like him."

Leslie looked long and steadily into her face, and for a moment spoke no word. Then letting loose all restraint his words rushed in a mad, vehement way that startled her.

"Allen! Allen!—he is your one absorbing thought—You talk to me of him, when you know that I have carried your image in my heart since I first saw your face, years, and years, and years ago—when you were a little girl of seven! When I made my maiden speech, your serious, wondering, baby eyes smiled into mine, and gave me courage. I swore then, that some day I would come back, and marry you. You have been my dream, my inspiration. Last winter in the city, when

I told you I loved you, and you told me you were engaged, I tried to bear my disappointment like a man, though it meant the uptearing of all my hopes, my aspirations. I tried to find comfort in the thought that your happiness was dearer to me than my own. But now—now that I see the man of your choice is not worthy of you, I shall combat him in every honorable way. Oh, Tillie, let me teach you to love me!"

"Mr. Brentford, Mr. Brentford—this is all so useless—and so sad. You say you have loved me for years. Thus do I feel toward Allen—he is part of my life—I have loved him all my life."

"The love of a boy and a girl!"

"Yes, the love of a boy and a girl—the sweetest, purest, most hallowed of all love—save a mother's—fresh as the morning dew upon the flower—pure as the perfume of the rose—sweet as violet's breath—the smiles of angels rest upon it.

"But why do you say Allen is unworthy? The charge is unjust, and unworthy of you who bring it."

"You look at Allen Creston through the rose colored glass of love, down the hazy vista of long acquaintance. I measure him with a

man's cool dispassionate judgment. The microscopic glass of knowledge of human nature, discloses to me a dual nature, resting under that very fair and suave exterior. But, he is the man you love, and were his nature as black as Egyptian night, instead of being, as you think—as fair as the dawn on Judea's purpling hills—yet would your woman's heart cling all the closer."

Tillie threw her head up haughtily, while a dark flush swept over her face.

"You are the first to cast an aspersion on Allen Creston, and some day, your nobler self will crave my pardon."

Down in the paddock Mrs. Barbee was caressing and admiring Sweetheart, and saying in dulcet tones:

"Oh, Mr. Creston, do let me ride this beautiful creature some day."

"She is not gentle enough for a lady to ride."

"But she will be soon. Then?"

"She is Miss Daveril's horse."

Mrs. Barbee's face fell.

"Some day—before you send her to Miss Daveril—she is a generous warm-hearted girl—she would not deprive me of this simple little pleasure," very pleadingly, with a sad beseeching look in the dark eyes.

"Why, Mrs. Barbee, if you so much desire it, I suppose Miss Daveril would not object, but—"

"It would be safer for Miss Daveril if some other lady first rode Sweetheart. Thank you. Now remember your promise. I used to have my own pedigreed riding horse, but it went, along with all other comforts and pleasures. Oh, Mr. Creston, you know nothing of sorrow; you lead a life of lavish ease; you have youth, wealth and—love," with down-dropping of the white lids, "and I—I—what have I? My life is a grim fight with poverty. I try to be brave, but it is hard; oh, so hard. You have your life all before you—my golden days are past. Though, if Colonel Barbee had one friend—one single kind, generous friend—who would help to tide him over this embarrassment, I believe he could yet retrieve his lost fortunes. But ah, wishes are vain—for chivalric friends went with fortune!"

VII

The picnic was followed, in quick succession, by various other entertainments, more or less pretentious, at the different country homes. Brookside was filled with visitors, and Mrs. Barbee kept the neighborhood in such a whirl of gaiety, that Elsie declared she felt like a dancing dervish. Allen and Theodore were the ostensible steerers of the social boat in its mad rush down stream, but Mrs. Barbee's trained hand was at the helm.

Leslie Brentford still lingered, and was daily at Daveril Dell. Ted pinched Tillie's rosy cheek and said:

"Leslie Brentford came to the country to hunt and fish; why is it, Miss Daveril, your family doesn't feast on game and fish, during his long stay in our midst?"

"Mr. Brentford hunts with a concentration of purpose—he doesn't scatter his forces," laughed Elsie. "There is but one little bird he seeks to snare; he cares naught for other game."

Tillie began to long for the quiet, simple, happy life of the old days, before Mrs. Barbee became the central figure of their little stage. The little circle of friends, true and tried, had been so merry and gay, in a warm hearted, genuine way—they didn't need this interloper, Tillie thought, resentfully. She so seldom saw Allen alone—always in a crowd, there to be monopolized by Mrs. Barbee, who would explain that she needed his advice about an entertainment she was planning, etc. Mrs. Barbee would say to Allen:

"Mr. Creston, we must not let Miss Tillie get dull, or lonely, or she will leave us and fly back to the city.''

Allen would say, in surprise:

"I am sure Miss Dayeril never seems dull or lonely; she has much to occupy her—her family—her friends—books—''

"And yourself,'' smiling sweetly.

"Yes, myself.''

After a time the guests returned to their homes, only Leslie Brentford remaining.

" 'The guests are fled, the lights are dead,' '' quoted Ted.

"And I'm glad of it,'' said Tillie.

"Oh, yes, you're glad; Leslie Brentford still lingers. But I—whom have I left? Not even Louie Graham, for she's got up a dreadful 'case' with that fellow Spencer, from town, and I haven't seen her for a week."

They were sitting on the lawn, in the cool of the afternoon. Elsie was busy with lace work, Doctor Thurston by her side toying with the thread. Ted sat tilted back in one chair, his feet propped up in another, smoking a cigar and lazily watching the curling wreaths of smoke through half-closed eyes.

Tillie sat in a hammock, lazily swinging back and forth. A click of the gate made them look up.

"Come over, Mr. Brentford," called out Ted; "have a seat—we are all too inert to move. We are about to die of stagnation."

Leslie drew the chair where his eyes could rest upon Tillie's face. To him her face was a flower to be seen; her voice a song to be heard; her mind a poem to be read. Today there was a brooding, despairing look in his eyes that it hurt Tillie to see, and she turned her face away to avoid the direct gaze that brought a flush to her cheek.

"Miss Daveril, I'm going home tomorrow," in low tones.

"How we shall miss you! But I trust you will come back to us next summer."

"Do you think I can stay so long away?"

"Ted, Mr. Brentford leaves us tomorrow," said Tillie, turning her blushing face away.

"If you do, we'll creep into our holes and die, and even Mrs. Barbee won't be able to pull us out," said Ted, dejectedly.

"Don't you think there's too much Mrs. Barbee, Ted?" asked Tillie; "that her ubiquity satiates?"

Ted threw away his cigar, straightened up with a quick energy, as he snapped out:

"Now, listen at that! No matter how sweet and good women are, they will be spiteful and envious towards each other. Mrs. Barbee has done more in six months for Brookside, in a social way, than was accomplished in a decade before."

"Well, Teddy boy, we got along a decade without Mrs. Barbee, and I think the neighborhood did not suffer from 'a long-felt want.' What has she done?"

"Nonsense, Tillie! you are bound to see a change in the neighborhood—so much of its country crudeness has been polished away."

"By Mrs. Barbee's veneering touch," continued Tillie. "But why polish us if we are

happy as we are? I always sympathized with the 'untutored savage' who had civilization thrust upon him, nolens volens. Why hamper the heathen with the burdens of progress and enlightenment if he is comfortable and happy as he is? We are all barbarians at heart, and secretly fret at the trammels of civilization. Why go out of our way to hunt up people to make miserable? We put plug hats on the heads of the demi-nude savage, whiskey in his mouth, and a Bible in his hand, and say, 'Oh thou son of nature, be like us; wear shoes and have corns; wear hats and have headaches; wear shirt waists and stiff collars, and curse the day you were born.' Why should Mrs. Barbee force us to belong to mothers' clubs, cooking clubs, literary clubs, and clubs innumerable, since we were happy in our blissful ignorance?"

"Speaking of clubs, Miss Daveril, do you know their origin?" interrupted Leslie.

"No."

"Saint Peter one day turned his eyes toward Earth, and a troubled look swept over his face. Calling an angelic courier he said: 'I see a growing discontent and restlessness among the women on Earth. Go down and see what the trouble is about.' "

"The angel departed. Returning, he stood dejectedly before Saint Peter, who asked,

"'What is the trouble?'

"'The women want to vote and hold office, as men do.'

"'This is serious. Go back and do what you can to adjust matters.'

"Returning again, the angel bowed low before Saint Peter, who asked,

"'Well?'

"'I organized them into literary clubs, and federations, where they can vote and hold office; and already they have begun to wire pull and stuff the ballot box, and they are happy.'

"'I fear me,' said Saint Peter, gazing musingly into space."

Tillie smiled and said, musingly:

"Oh, Clubs! How many nonentities you have incubated into commonplace entities! How much skim milk has curdled along with the cream! How many tallow-candle brains have flickered their feeble flames in the glare of the incandescent!"

Ted lounged back in his chair, his head thrown back into the clasped palms of his hands; his eyes filled with smiling affection as they rested on Tillie's sparkling face.

Answering his glance, Tillie said:

"Mrs. Barbee may have her clubs, Teddy boy, and all other social props she needs, if she will only let us go back to the old quiet, happy life." Then turning her smiling face upon Leslie Brentford, said:

"Mr. Brentford, you have never been to one of our club meetings? No? You have missed much. You should hear our heavy weight discussions, by heavy weight members, on the crime of wearing birds on our hats. Why would not a dead bird as willingly adorn a hat as a platter? Then, when you see us sit down to bountiful tables to dine on chops from bleating lambs; cutlets from little tender calves; quail on toast; silvery trout from watery depths—you must control your risibles, and you must not say, 'consistency, thou art a jewel;' you must remember you have aspirations, and the club is a power."

"Indeed, Miss Daveril, I acknowledge the power of the woman's club—it has cast off its swaddling clothes, and whatever subject it seriously discusses must have man's most respectful consideration."

"At last," said Tillie, "the masculine mind has learned that woman is not a joke. Man is God's joke—woman is His tear. Nor is it

the club alone, you must respect, Mr. Brentford, you must reckon with mediocrity; the mediocre mass rules the world; genius and ambition must cater to it, else their empyrean-seeking wings will be crushed by its weight. Win the all-powerful commonplace, and its lauding breath grows into fame wafting breeze."

"Fair Portia," said Ted, "since Mr. Brentford's 'empyrean-seeking wings' are already rustling within the Temple of Success, don't you think your well-meant advice rather stale? Ah, here is Allen."

Allen Creston came in the gate, and walking over joined the group under the trees.

"Allen, you have just missed a most instructive discourse by Tillie," said Ted.

"What was the subject?" asked Allen.

"Primarily, Mrs. Barbee; incidentally, every topic under the sun," replied Ted.

"Mrs. Barbee is comprehensive enough to embrace many subjects, isn't she, Mr. Creston?" asked Leslie.

A flush and scowl passed like a flitting shadow over Allen's face, as he answered with forced politeness:

"Mrs. Barbee is undoubtedly an interesting subject."

"And has many interested subjects," said Tillie, flippantly, as she walked over to Leslie's side.

"Let us go gather some roses," and they walked off together. Allen scowled after them, cut and hurt. All were silent a moment, then Ted spoke:

"Pretty cool that, isn't it, Allen? But Tillie's out of sorts today; she's been talking such a lot of rubbish as set my teeth on edge."

Elsie and Doctor Thurston essayed to make conversation, but Allen was moody and silent.

"Where have you been all day, Allen?" Ted asked; "I was over at Creston Lodge this morning, and William said you left home very early."

"I drove Mrs. Barbee in to town. Her horse had cut himself on a barbed wire fence, and as I had business in town, I went by for her, knowing she had planned to go in this morning."

Tillie and Leslie were standing by a rose bush near by. Her eyes were bent upon the roses; the scissors remained suspended for a moment, then came down with a sudden click upon the stem of a rose. In a moment they rejoined the group, Tillie's arms full of roses. She gave a flower to each, save Allen. With witching grace, smiling up into Leslie's face,

she pinned the loveliest rose upon his coat. He looked down at the little soft, white hand, lightly touching his coat. He drew a long, deep breath, and his teeth cut sharp into his lower lip.

Allen came up and asked, reproachfully, in low tones,

"Tillie, haven't you a flower for me?"

"Yes;" taking from the bunch a great bold, flaunting, blood red rose, with long thorned stem, she gave it him, saying, "Take this to Mrs. Barbee;" with a little hard laugh, turned and walked into the house.

Allen courteously said good-bye to all, abruptly left, leaving the crimson rose lying, like a stain, upon the grass. Soon Elsie and Ted were left alone.

"Elsie, what is the matter with Tillie? I never saw her so cool to Allen before."

"I don't know, Ted, but I fancy she thinks he is rather too attentive to Mrs. Barbee for an engaged young man."

"Mrs. Barbee! The preposterous idea! I did think, Elsie, you were above such littleness. Why, Mrs. Barbee, besides being a married woman, is five years older than Allen."

"You don't know the world yet, Teddy."

"The idea of Tillie being jealous!"

"I hardly think it is jealousy, Ted; but likely she resents Mrs. Barbee's usurpation of Allen; you know she does monopolize much of Allen's time. He drives her about, does errands for her, and is fast becoming Mrs. Barbee's general utility man. I think it is the detriment to Allen's dignity and character that offends Tillie, who is very fine and high-minded, and can tolerate nothing that is not noble, upright and manly in a man."

Theodore sat a moment in thought.

"Allen is quite a good deal with Mrs. Barbee," he said, reflectively. "But you know he and Colonel Barbee are now in business together—running a stock farm."

"Allen, I suppose, stocking the farm, Colonel Barbee furnishing the experience, and Mrs. Barbee the grace and charm to gild so prosaic a business."

VIII

Mrs. Barbee drove slowly along the country road. The smile was gone from her dark, attractive face. The large, dark eyes were full of brooding thought. Stopping at her gate, her husband came out and gallantly assisted her from the buggy.

"Did you have a pleasant drive, Clara?"

"Yes, though a bit lonely. I stopped for a moment at Creston Lodge to ask Allen Creston to dinner tomorrow."

They were going slowly toward the house.

"What a lovely, well-kept place Creston Lodge is! And this—" with a derisive sweep of the hand towards the dilapidated house that confronted them—"is so bare, so dreary, so horrible!" She sank down upon the step and burst into tears.

"Why, Clara! I know, my dear—I know it is hard for you, but I'm doing the best I can. With the loan young Creston has made me I hope soon to get on my feet again."

"You are always getting on your feet," stormily, rising and going on the veranda, "but you are like a crawling child! I put you on your feet, but you can't stand; you totter, you fall, you drag me down with you. But I tell you, I won't be dragged down!" with a stamp of the foot and flashing eyes. "Do you suppose I married a man, double my age, for this?" with scorn, and a wave of the hand towards the unkempt lawn. "I have borne it all as bravely as I could. Now, you must have money."

"Why, Clara, have patience, my dear; I am doing the best I can. The money I borrowed from young Creston has enabled me to put this farm in good working order, but you know the returns from farming come in slowly, slowly; and it takes time, my dear; takes time."

"You must take time by the forelock, and that, in this instance, means—Allen Creston."

"I think Creston and I will make money out of the stock farm when we get it fairly started; he has fine blooded stock, and he is sending many head of horses and cattle over to the farm. I think we'll manage, my dear—I think we'll manage. Young Creston is prodigal and generous with his money. Just give me time."

"You must manage! Give me full sway, and I'll bring him to terms. I am sick and tired of this life of galling poverty. Tired! Tired! Do you think that I was meant for such a life as this? When I married you, you were rich and influential. Who would have thought that a few years would find us reduced to poverty, and buried in this desolate, forsaken spot!"

"Clara, I was rich, but you must remember, dear, your tastes are very luxurious, and I denied you nothing, my dear. Travel, lavish hospitality, sumptuous entertainments, elegant dressing, jewels—all that required money; and as long as I had money, Clara, it was yours. It was not my fault that all my investments turned out badly."

"Fate has been cruel, and I am tired of it all. Tired! Tired!" and she swept into the house, leaving the colonel surprised, and energetically rubbing his hands together. "Dear, dear;" with puzzled air, looking at his wife's disappearing form; "I never saw Clara like this before—something must have gone wrong!"

Evidently Colonel Barbee took his wife's advice, and took time by the forelock, for in

the course of a few weeks, his place began to wear an air of thrift and prosperity. The house, after the renovating touch of repairs and paint, adorned the well-kept lawn. Mrs. Barbee threw open her doors, with cordial hospitality, to the neighborhood, and her house became the rendezvous of the young people of Brookside—only Elsie and Tillie Daveril holding aloof.

The very elect would have felt impelled to pause before suspecting Mrs. Barbee of guile. Her gaze was so frank and unswerving; her smile so candid and sweet; her feminine grace so winning, that women, as well as men, felt the irresistible charm of her personality. She played her game of human chess with consummate skill, and moved her pawns about at will. When Tillie saw how fast Allen was becoming but a puppet in Mrs. Barbee's deft hands, her whole soul rose up in indignant resentment and rebellion, though she scorned to cope with such an antagonist.

After his talk with Elsie, followed by a vigorous one from his mother, Ted began to see Mrs. Barbee in a new light, and he grew to share Tillie's feeling of resentment towards

the woman who was fast estranging Allen from them. Mrs. Daveril had said:

"Theodore, Mrs. Barbee is a very attractive woman—certainly a very magnetic one, and may be a perfect lady—I hope she is. But, when young men grow indispensable to a married woman, it is time for some one to call a halt; and if the woman doesn't, the man should; and you, Mr. Theodore, are going to halt. You are too young, too plastic, too easily flattered—as all men are, vanity being a man's weakest point—to be so much under the influence of a woman like Mrs. Barbee, and these rides and drives must stop. There are plenty of sweet young girls for you to show your attentions to. It may be all right for Allen to spend so much of his time at the Barbee's, but I never before knew of a case where two men being engaged in business together, it necessitated a daily conference with the wife. Allen, poor boy, is young and vain, and he is flattered that a society woman like Mrs. Barbee would single him out for her attentions. Nothing places a man in a more contemptible light than to be dangling from the apron strings of another man's wife. You didn't know a fascinating woman like Mrs. Barbee had apron strings, did you, Teddy?

You thought they were reserved for the wives of hen-pecked husbands, and the mothers of goody-goody boys. Well, such women as Mrs. Barbee have apron strings, and to see a husband dangling from one end, and a young man from the other, is a sight to make men laugh, and angels weep."

Mrs. Daveril talked in a similar strain to Allen, who took it kindly, thanking her, and saying if she thought his conduct verged in the slightest on impropriety, he would discontinue his visits to the Barbee home, while he would be sorry to hurt or offend Colonel, or Mrs. Barbee, both of whom were very kind to him, and his life was lonely. He and the colonel were much interested in their stock farm, he continued, and this brought them much together.

Mr. Daveril also talked with Allen, saying: "Why, Allen, you are getting to be quite a man of business. Hope your ventures will prove profitable; but remember the old saying about too many irons in the fire. I turned your estate over to you in fine condition; money in bonds and bank; pedigreed horses of value; the plantation bringing in a fine income. With good management you will always be a rich man; but beware of adventur-

ers, Allen. I hope this stock farm venture will benefit you, as well as Colonel Barbee; he seems to be flourishing like a green bay tree; somebody's hands are being burned—I hope not yours, Allen?"

Allen would flush and go into an explanation of how the business was profitable to him, as well as the colonel. Mr. Daveril would rejoin:

"Don't think me meddlesome, or officious, Allen. What I say is in love and kindness. Your father and I were boys together, just as you and Ted are. He was a noble man, and I hope to see you follow in his footsteps. He left you and your estate, during your minority, in my care, and though you are a man now, my interest in your welfare is very deep."

Then Tillie, in a sweet, half-chiding way, would ask:

"Where do you spend your time, Allen? We do not see you so often as we used."

"I am taking Iago's advice, Tillie; I am putting money in my purse."

"It rather looks as if you were taking it out and putting it in another's."

"Why, Tillie, do you dare impugn your future lord's business acumen?"

"Money, money! I am tired of all this greed and scramble for money! We were so happy before you became absorbed in business—and the Barbees."

"Tillie, a pearl like you needs a rich setting."

IX.

"Tillie, go put on your riding habit, and we will ride over to see Louie Graham. Allen asked to be notified when we go, as he wishes to go with us. I will send Oscar over to tell him. Elsie has gone with Doctor Thurston to see one of his patients."

Tillie bounded up the steps, returning in a moment, trim and stylish in her dark habit.

Ted helped her on her horse, then mounted his own. In a moment Oscar came up in a half run.

"Marse Allen warn't dar, sah; William say he lef home er hour ago, sah."

Tillie's pretty face clouded over, but she forced away her disappointment, and began a merry chat with Ted.

When well past Creston Lodge, they saw two horses coming at a lively canter, far down the shady road. They drew near. Black Lee and Sweetheart! Allen and Mrs. Barbee!

"Oh, Ted, she's riding Sweetheart!" with a little catch in her voice.

"Allen! The graceless fool!" muttered Ted, a flush of anger sweeping over his face.

When Mrs. Barbee and Allen reached them, they reined their horses in, Allen by the side of Tillie, Mrs. Barbee next to Ted; her face was flushed and sparkling, her eyes bright and shining, and she was more beautiful than Tillie had ever seen her. She leaned over, saying sweetly:

"Miss Daveril, Sweetheart is such a perfect traveler; such a peerless beauty; how I envy you her possession! Was it not kind of Mr. Creston to give me this exquisite pleasure be fore he sends her to you?" and she patted Sweetheart's arched neck gently.

"Very kind, indeed," with unsmiling face, and haughty poise of the head. Every dart that struck her heart wrote its story in Tillie's honest face, giving Mrs. Barbee secret exultation.

"It was kind of Mrs. Barbee to be willing to risk herself on Sweetheart. But Mrs. Barbee is a fearless equestrienne," said Allen.

Tillie thought, with a pang, that Allen knew she, also, was devoid of fear, mounted on a horse. Mrs. Barbee chatted gaily with Ted, ignoring his brusque replies and moody

face. Allen tried to engage Tillie in conversation, but her replies were monosyllabic.

Tillie touched her horse lightly with the whip, and with a faint smile and cool little nod, she and Ted dashed down the shady road. But their morning was spoiled, and they made but a short call at Louie Graham's, even her gay nonsense evoked but weak laughter and dreary smiles. On their homeward way Tillie tried to be merry, but Ted was moody and unresponsive. At their gate he said, "Go in, Tillie," and wheeling his horse around, he rode swiftly off towards Creston Lodge.

Tillie went wearily up-stairs to her room, and throwing herself upon the bed, burst into tears, saying to herself:

"Dear, dear Sweetheart! I loved her so! She is so beautiful! How I had looked forward to the first ride upon her, with Allen on Lee! Now I will never, never touch her again."

Allen met Ted at the steps and said, genially:

"Come in, Ted; have a seat."

But Ted was too restless to sit. Allen looked inquiringly into his unsmiling, cold face. How like Tillie the boy was. Allen's heart warmed

toward this dear boyhood friend, and in a voice as tender as a woman's, he asked:

"What's the trouble, Ted?"

Theodore was honest and direct, and facing Allen, and looking him full in the eye, his own blazing, and Allen's full of questioning inquiry, said:

"Allen, do you think you are showing Tillie the courtesy she is entitled to?"

"I derelict in courtesy to Tillie? What do you mean?"

"It strikes me your assiduous attentions to Mrs. Barbee are given at the expense of my sister's dignity and your own."

"You talk in riddles—explain yourself."

"If you do not understand, it is because you are a stupid fool!"

Allen drew his head up proudly, his face white with anger, his nostrils dilating and his eyes flashing angrily into Theodore's.

"Has Tillie complained of me?"

"No."

"Then why, you presumptuous fool, do you interfere in what does not concern you?"

"Not concern me? Do you suppose my sister's happiness does not concern me? You may be indifferent to it, but, by heaven! it touches me closer than anything on earth!"

L. of C.

Allen was about to reply stormily, but a suave, pleasant voice behind him said, "Have a glass of lemonade, Mr. Allen, Mr. Ted," and turning, he saw William, bearing a waiter with glasses of the cool iced drink. William had been busy working about the rose bushes near the house, and heard the high angry voices of the two boys. Being a born diplomat, a colored Talleyrand, William slipped to the rear of the house and appeared in time to avert possible trouble. The two men were but boys to him, and he managed them with the same tactful skill he had used to avert their childish quarrels in by-gone days. The hot, angry men quaffed the cooling drink. William stood respectfully by, engaging them in conversation, his long residence with the Crestons giving him that privilege.

"Mr. Allen, they tell me the fish are bitin' fine in Silver Lake. Remember when I took you'n Mr. Ted there once, when you was little fellows, and you got to fightin' over an old mud turtle, and both fell in the lake? The scare took all the fight out of you boys, and you both come up out of the water just as lovin' as you please. I tell you it takes trouble to draw folks together, and make 'em humble.

We all need a little shadow to make us enjoy the sunshine.''

Before they knew it both boys were laughing at the remembrance of their boyish escapades. William left their presence with dignified bearing, and sober face, but in the butler's pantry he chuckled softly to himself.

''Now, Allen,'' said Ted, kindly, ''don't you think you are too much at the Barbees?''

''Am I?''

''I think so, and so do others. The gossips are busy with your names.''

''Indeed? What do they say?'' coldly constrained.

''They say you are in the toils of a designing pair; that you are their financial dupe; that by flattery and cajolery they are wheedling you out of your fortune. My father and mother hold this opinion, and they have been hoping the glamour would pass away, and that you would see this woman in her true light. There are bolder ones who whisper that the friendship between you and Mrs. Barbee, begun as a business speculation on her part, has passed the platonic stage.''

''Such a suspicion is an insult to your sister!'' rising and flashing his stormy eyes into Theodore's face.

"I do not hold that suspicion—if I did, my sister, with my consent, would never see you again. Don't be angry, Allen; review your conduct, and I think you will see that you furnished the kernels for the swine of gossip to feed upon. Allen, you are in the toils of a designing woman, who will lead you on to your ruin. Save yourself before it is too late. I speak as your life-long friend, Allen. Do not let this vampire suck away your honor, your manhood. She and her husband are like two ghouls, feasting in grinning glee on the corpse of a dead manhood; tearing away, bit by bit, honor, truth, integrity, to glut their insatiate greed. Allen! Allen! I know my words are strong; but I love you, and would save you," putting out a restraining hand as Allen arose in white, quivering wrath.

"Allen!" Ted's voice quivered, and tears rushed to his boyish blue eyes, "think of our life before she came into it. So happy, so innocent. Now there is reserve, deception, and you are changed—so changed. You are breaking Tillie's heart, Allen, though she says not a word; I can see it. You must choose between her and this woman. To couple their names is an insult to Tillie. Either you love Tillie or you do not. If you do love her, her

happiness and all that concerns her, should be as dear to you as to me. If you do not love her, then go your way and let her go hers."

Allen sat moody, silent, his dark eyes expressing the waves of thought that flashed through his mind. At last he spoke, in low, hoarse tones.

"Ted, you know I love Tillie more than my very life, and have loved her always. I can see now what a blatant fool I have been, and I shall cut loose from these people just as soon as I can get my business in a shape to do so. They have been very kind, hospitable and pleasant to me, and I did not realize it was with a design; but now that I look back on past events, your suspicion that they have been using me as a tool for their financial benefit, seems to be borne out by facts. But, I have enough of this world's goods, Ted, to help a fallen brother, and if I could put these people on their feet again, I was glad to be able to do so. Mrs. Barbee's life seemed hard and dull; she had been accustomed to society and luxuries; her home is a pleasant place to visit; she is agreeable—"

"You are rather too young, Allen, to play the good Samaritan to a fascinating married flirt; or, if you must play the role, throw her

your purse and ride by. Give her your dollars, but save your manhood; and that you can do only by shunning her, for she and Colonel Barbee will not loose their grip upon you until they have squeezed you dry. Let us look at facts, Allen. Less than ten months ago the Barbees came to this neighborhood, completely broken in fortune, to a ruined, dilapidated farm, with a ramshackle house. Today the Colonel owns half-interest in a blooded-stock farm; his home place is in fine repair; his wife has her carriage and horses, and servants; she dresses handsomely, and entertains lavishly, for a country home. The Colonel left nothing but debts and a bad reputation behind him, so there can be nothing coming to him from the city—but duns. Brookside farms are not so productive as to yield a fortune, however small, in one year; so the prosperity of the Barbees occasions much gossip, and I regret to say, Allen, your name suffers."

Had this talk come from any other than Ted—his playmate, his friend, his companion, his spirit's brother—Allen would have resented it with furious anger and blows.

He sat quiet and thoughtful. Then rising, with the light of an inward resolve reflected in

his face, he clasped Theodore's hand, the two looking silently into each others faces.

"Ted, I have been in the wrong, but I swear, as God is some day to be my judge, that never again will I do aught to wound Tillie."

Early in the afternoon Joe, looking very important, and grinning from ear to ear, came over to Daveril Dell, leading Sweetheart. Tied high up on her fetlock was a tiny blue ribbon bow, from which dangled a card. The family went into the yard to admire the beautiful spirited creature; only Tillie stood aloof, on the gallery. Ted untied the card and handed it to her. She glanced at the words it bore, "Tillie, with love, from Allen," then it fluttered through her fingers and fell to the ground.

"Isn't she beautiful, Tillie?" asked Elsie, smiling.

"Yes. Take her to the stable, Joe."

An hour later Oscar, leading Sweetheart, walked dejectedly over to Creston Lodge, muttering sullenly:

"White folks sho' is cu'ious critters."

He bore this note to Allen:

"Dear Allen: Thank you, so much, for Sweetheart; but she is such a dear, dainty little aristocrat, I fear her equine fastidiousness might rebel at the less luxurious quarters than those to which she has been accustomed, so I return her to you. TILLIE."

Allen was cut to the heart.

X

"Tillie, get your hat, and we will walk over to Allen's. I want to remind him of the pears he promised me; I expect he has forgotten about them;" and Mrs. Daveril went down the steps, and on across the lawn. Tillie threw down her book and quickly joined her mother. She walked with springing, buoyant step, the folds of her garments falling in clinging grace about her rounded, girlish figure.

The haze of dying summer hung about the clear, blue sky; the dew of morning was on the browning grass, and the air was fragrant with ripening fruit. They passed on down the path, out of the orchard into the pasture, where browsing cattle, fresh from their morning meal, stood with distended nostrils, drinking in the grain-scented air. Then on through the little strip of wood—bright hued birds and butterflies darting in and out the leafy trees. The little trailing path ended at a gate at one side of the yard at Creston Lodge. Here Mrs.

Daveril and Tillie entered, and passed around to the front of the house. On the long, cool gallery sat Mrs. Barbee, in faultless attire, lazily rocking back and forth, talking to Allen, who sat on the step at her feet, listening so intently that he was unconscious of the ladies' presence until they stood before him. He paled to the lips, then rising, in quick confusion, a wave of dark red surged over his face. But quickly mastering himself, he said, with a smile, and extended hand: "Good morning, Mrs. Daveril; good morning, Tillie; come in. I am thrice fortunate this morning in having calls from three ladies. I am beloved of the gods."

"Let us trust you will not die young," smilingly rejoined Mrs. Barbee.

A cloud swept over Tillie's bright, happy face, and with a curt "Good morning," in reply to Allen's greeting, and a faint, cool bow in response to Mrs. Barbee's very cordial "Good morning," she remained standing at the foot of the stone step. Mrs. Daveril also stood in quiet, unsmiling dignity. Allen entered the gallery and placed chairs for the ladies, but when he saw they were not coming in, he walked down the steps and stood by Tillie's side. Mrs. Barbee occupied the gal-

lery in solitary state, with elegant composure, languidly opening and shutting her ivory fan, her dark, magnetic eyes fixed with smiling glance, first upon Tillie's pale cheeks, and Allen's darkly flushing face.

"I couldn't resist, Mrs. Daveril," said Mrs. Barbee, in tones of liquid sweetness, "driving over this fresh, beautiful morning, to beg the loan of the last new novel of Mr. Creston. He seems an insatiate devourer of new fiction, and I am a literary Lazarus, picking up the crumbs from this young Dives' table."

"Quite an apt comparison, Mrs. Barbee, but one cannot believe you content with crumbs." Mrs. Barbee colored a faint pink under Mrs. Daveril's steady gaze.

Allen flushed, but with much cordiality repeated his invitation to the ladies to come in.

"No, thank you, Allen," replied Mrs. Daveril; "I came over to remind you of the pears you begged me as a favor to accept; but I believe, after all, I won't preserve today—the weather is warmer than I thought, and the walk has tired me."

"Pray pardon my negligence about the pears, Mrs. Daveril; I will have William gather them at once, and take them over. Come in and rest!"

"No, I must go."

"Then if you will not remain, Mrs. Daveril, permit me to send you home in the carriage, if you are tired? '

"Thank you, no, Allen."

Tillie stood at the foot of the step with the cold, proud dignity of a young queen, her honest, haughty eyes fixed upon Mrs. Barbee's dark, pretty, composed face. With a slight, graceful inclination of the head, and a brief, quick glance of the eye sweeping Allen's impassive face, she passed with quick step out the little gate, her mother following. Allen walked into the hall, and returning with his hat in his hand, bowed with courtly grace before Mrs. Barbee, saying:

"Mrs. Barbee, will you kindly excuse me for a moment? You will find the book you wish on the library table." With quick, long strides he was soon by Tillie's side.

"Tillie, you are misjudging me."

No word or glance from Tillie.

"Tillie, how could I prevent her coming to my house this morning? I could not order her out."

"I have made no accusation, or complaint, Allen; you are answering your own accusing conscience."

"But I can see that you are offended, Tillie."

"Go back to your guest, Allen. I am tired; I don't care to talk;" and with languid, listless step, Tillie passed down the little path. Allen looked sadly after her, then with a sigh turned homeward. Meeting Mrs. Daveril, he lifted his hat and paused, but looking him sadly in the face she passed on.

Within the hour Allen was walking up the steps at Daveril Dell. Elsie met him at the door.

"Come in, Allen."

"Elsie, where is Tillle?"

"In her room, lying down, I think, Allen. She complained of a headache and the heat when she returned from her walk."

"Please tell her I want to see her?"

"I hardly think she will come down, she seemed too indisposed."

"Please—please see, Elsie."

Elsie looked inquiringly into the eager, boyish face, then went up-stairs.

Tillie was lying on a couch in her room, very still and pale, her eyes closed as if asleep.

"Tillie!" Elsie's voice was very sweet and tender. She lifted one little white hand—the one on which Allen's diamond glittered and gleamed, and pressed it to her lips.

"Dearest, Allen is down stairs. Can't you go down for a little while?"

The eyes did not open, and she turned her head wearily away.

"I am tired, Elsie; my head aches."

"Poor Allen looks so sad, Tillie; won't you go down and speak to him?"

"No, not now. He may come tomorrow."

Allen received the message in silence, and with an uplifting of the hat, he abruptly passed down the graveled walk.

A little later William came over bearing a great hamper of pears for Mrs. Daveril, and a small basket heaped with luscious golden pears, downy blushing peaches, velvety purple grapes, and a bouquet of choice, exquisite flowers.

"For Miss Tillie, with Mr. Allen's compliments," as he handed the smaller basket to Mammy Letty.

"Take the basket up-stairs, Letty, to Tillie," said Mrs. Daveril. Mammy Letty went into Tillie's room and held the basket of fruit and flowers up before the recumbent girl.

"Look heah, honey! ain't dey pretty? What you doin' lollin' roun' lak sick folks? Dat ain't lak mammy's little old mischievous Tillie. You didn't use ter hav no time fur restin'; you so feared you gwine miss some fun er frolic, you scacely low old Letty ter put you to sleep—lowin' 'you ain't sleepy'—when all de time yer pretty little eyes keep er closin' to, while mammy gather yer up in her arms, in yer little white gown, and sing 'Hush-a-by baby, 'pon de tree top.' All de time you keep 'lowing' 'I ain't sleepy,' 'til yer little curly head hang heavy on mammy's arm; den I low, bless de Lawd, de baby's 'sleep, and de mischief's dun fur dis day.

"Git up fum dar! you lazy chile, you!" and gathering the supple young form in her brawny, black arms, bore the laughing girl in triumph down stairs, out on the back gallery, where Mrs. Daveril and Elsie sat. When she saw William, dignified and respectful, standing, hat in hand by the kitchen door, Tillie sprang to her feet with a quick assumption of dignity. As she gave no note or message for Allen, William stood in embarrassed silence, twirling his hat—then asked:

"Is there any word, Miss Tillie?"

"No, William."

"Law, honey, course dere is; you dun frustrated long er me fetchin' you down stairs. Tell Marse Allen, Miss Tillie's bleeged to him."

When William was quite out of sight, Mrs. Daveril said, imperatively:

"Letty, get those pears and follow me!"

Mrs. Daveril went into the yard, Letty following, bearing the great hamper of pears. On they went until they reached the hog lot; then, opening the gate, Mrs. Daveril commanded:

"Pour those pears on the ground, Letty." Mammy Letty stood in open-mouth astonishment, but after one look into Mrs. Daveril's set, stern face, did as ordered, and poured the pears on the ground, where they rolled away to be quickly devoured by the grunting, squealing, scrambling hogs.

"Fur de Lawd's sake!" was Mammy Letty's sole comment, as she walked slowly back to the house.

XI

When Theodore Daveril learned of Tillie's meeting with Mrs. Barbee at Creston Lodge, and Allen Creston's betrayal of the solemn promise made him, he felt outraged, insulted, and a passionate resentment crushed out the warm affection he had all his life cherished for Allen. That Allen would toy with Tillie's heart in this idle, callous manner, and that Tillie would still cling to him, was a poisoned dart that rankled deep in Theodore's proud heart. Why wouldn't she break with Allen! Leslie Brentford loved her--he was a man any woman might be proud of. Exacting indeed the woman who could not be content with all Leslie Brentford had to give—character, wealth, brains, position. Why couldn't Tillie love him? Bah! Tillie a pining, lovesick girl! Tillie, courted and admired, to fix her heart upon a vain, weak fool—the toy of a married flirt. A sweat of impotent rage would break out upon Theodore, and he would grasp Tillie's arm roughly, saying:

"Where is your spirit, girl? It is not like you, Tillie, to throw your heart in the dust to be trampled upon!"

But never a word would Tillie answer, only sigh and walk wearily away.

Then Theodore, storming under the stings of his hurt pride and affection, would go to his father and mother, begging them to command Tillie to break with Allen.

"No, Theodore," Mrs. Daveril would answer, "Tillie must decide for herself. Allen is under the glamour of an infatuation, that will soon wear away. He has many sterling, noble qualities; he is young, and in time his true manhood will assert itself. We must be patient with him for Tillie's sake."

And Mr. Daveril would say:

"For the sake of his father and the Creston name, we must try to save the boy. His love for Tillie is his only safe anchor. If we cut him adrift now, he goes headlong to ruin."

"But don't immolate Tillie to save Allen," Ted would angrily reply.

"Tillie makes no sacrifice of herself. She loves Allen, and to give him up would be the sacrifice," Mr. Daveril would answer.

"Our personal feelings, Theodore," his mother would say, "must not be considered.

Of course your pride, and mine, prompts us to say to Allen Creston, 'never darken our doors again;' but, the affair is Tillie's; her affections are involved, and if we hurt Allen, we wound her. Each has her own life to live, and must live it as she sees fit and best. No other hand than our own can cut and shape our lives. There is nothing we can do but wait."

Ted would reply,

"Allen is a vain, blind dupe. This woman who has entangled him, keeps her place in society only by sheer audacity and boldness; by the social props she has hedged about herself; by her foolish, or knavish husband's blind faith in her, or his venal acceptance of dishonored gain. She is a Napoleon in petticoats—she marshals her forces with consummate skill. Sex robbed the world of a great general."

In spite of all, Tillie still loved and trusted Allen, holding his youth, his loneliness, his generous courtesy, in tender extenuation.

"Only have faith in me, Tillie, and all will come right," Allen would say.

"I do trust you, Allen, and will until you make trust impossible. You are so alone, my poor boy! There seems no one who believes

in you but me. While you wound me, Allen, time and again, I cannot think it is with design, so I forgive and forget, and love you in spite of all, my dear lonely boy."

Time is kind and gentle to youth, wiping away tears and soothing sighs. Allen at last seemed to have awakened to a realization of his position, and was making strenuous efforts to break the chains that bound him. His innate courtesy and kindness of heart would permit him to do nothing rashly—he was endeavoring to sever his business connections with Colonel Barbee in a way that would leave no sting. He was fast becoming the light-hearted boy of yore, and Tillie's blythe gaiety returned. Allen came over daily, and Ted, for Tillie's sake, forgot and forgave much, and the happy, golden days seemed to have returned. The remembrance of Mrs. Barbee was as a dark, half-forgotten dream.

XII

Mrs. Barbee saw with apprehension that the Daverils were fast regaining their influence over Allen, and her hold upon him was becoming weaker. She realized that immediate, strategic action was necessary to recover her waning power over him. Under the hypnotic influence of her magnetic personality she could mould and shape him as she willed, but of late he had shunned her—"Tillie Daveril's work, or her officious brother's," she mused. Something must be done that would wound the Daveril's, and ensnare Allen.

A crisp October day, when the air was like wine, and a purple haze mingled with the gold of the sunshine, Elsie, Tillie and Ted came indoors from a ramble through the autumn woods, exhilarated, flushed and merry. In the hall stood William, hat in one

hand, in the other bearing cards, which he handed, with courtly bow, to the ladies, and Theodore—and withdrew.

Colonel and Mrs. Barbee
Mr. Allen Creston.
At Home
Creston Lodge.
Dancing.

The words blurred and swam before Tillie's eyes, and the card dropped from her nerveless hand.

For one brief moment Theodore stood as if turned to stone; then with blazing, burning eyes, and white, set face, he dashed from the room. Elsie and Tillie saw him mount his horse and ride swiftly away toward Creston Lodge.

He dismounted at the gate and strode furiously up the walk, where Allen and Mrs. Barbee were standing. She was holding the skirt of her riding habit with one hand, with the

other flicking the flowers with her gold-handled riding whip.

Theodore confronted Allen, his eyes glowing like coals of fire from out his rigid, white face.

"I am come to answer your invitation!" and he threw the shredded bits of paper full in Allen Creston's face.

For an instant Mrs. Barbee quailed, then with a low, silvery laugh, she passed out the gate.

For one brief moment Allen stood in surprised and indignant astonishment; then he sprang upon Theodore, and the two, pallid with passion, grappled and fought, breathing heavy, panting breaths, crunching the shells under their shifting, sliding feet. Allen went down, and a knife gleamed in Theodore's hand, flashed in the morning sunlight, then came down into Allen's neck, followed by a gush of blood, and leaving a narrow gash.

William came running up.

"Oh, young gentlemen! young gentlemen! what does this mean? Mr. Allen, remember this is your house, and he is Miss Tillie's brother."

"I think I have given him all that could be demanded of hospitality, William—my blood,"

said Allen, with grim satire, walking toward the house, his shirt red and wet with blood.

Elsie and Tillie watched with eager, questioning eyes, Theodore's moody face, but they knew his moods too well to question him. Tillie sat white and rigid, under a nervous tension that threatened to snap and force her to either scream or swoon. When it seemed she could no longer bear the strain, Allen came hurriedly up the walk, and in the door. Ted rose quickly and advanced toward him, white and quivering with rage, and Mrs. Daveril, with haughty dignity, stepped forward—but Tillie, brushing quickly by them, went up to Allen, looking with sad, mournful eyes into his pallid face. Seeing the red gash, she cried out:

"Allen, you are hurt! Ted has hurt you!"

"Pshaw, Tillie, it is nothing; only a scratch," smiled Allen.

"Tillie Daveril! to fawn and cling to the man who has insulted her!" muttered Ted, angrily, through his clenched teeth, as he strode out of the room.

When he and Tillie were alone, Allen said, with a quiver in his voice:

"Sweet love—my little Tillie! You do not reproach me?"

"Why reproach you, Allen? If you have done wrong, the sting of your conscience is enough to bear without bitter words from me."

"Tillie, I did not mean to wound you—I did not think—"

"Allen, I am cut to the heart."

"Tillie, you can't believe I would intentionally offend you?"

"No, Allen; but it pains me to see you so unstable—so buffeted by every wind that blows. And, Allen—surely, Allen, you knew how it must seem to my family that you give this ball—at your house—with these people?"

Sorrowful and repentant, Allen looked intently into Tillie's sad, pale face, and said, eagerly, nervously,

"Tillie, let me explain. When you have heard me, you will see that I was actuated only by right motives, and that Theodore, in his hot-headed, impulsive way, has taken needless offense."

Tillie sat silent and pale, a sad little smile upon her lips, listening to his explanation, well knowing the fountain source of his reasoning.

When Allen looked into her eyes for some sign of approval, she said:

"Sophistry, Allen—mere sophistry. Your kind, trusting heart blinds you to the evil in others. I have not reproached you, Allen, but now I make a demand of you—my dignity exacts it, and my regard for your dignity and standing. This ball must be given up—the invitations must be recalled—else you and I must part—forever!" Her voice was low and sweet, but firm; her air determined.

"Tillie, you cannot mean you would give me up for a trifle like this?"

"It is not a trifle, Allen. But let us have no more words. I have spoken; you must make your decision."

"Tillie, can there be but one choice for me, do you think? The ball shall be given up, the invitations called in, if you feel so strongly about it. But, Tillie, in return, you must promise to marry me—soon—"

"Allen, if you are true—and from this day forsake all others—yes—in the spring."

When William handed Mrs. Barbee a note from Allen, she scanned its contents, then said, brightly:

"No answer, William."

But alone, within the locked doors of her room she read it, with rigid face and flashing eyes.

"Mrs. Barbee: For good and sufficient reasons, I find it impracticable to give the ball at Creston Lodge, and the invitations will be recalled at once. Trusting the change of plans will not inconvenience you, I remain, etc.,

ALLEN CRESTON."

Brief, cold, curt, almost rude. And this to her! This was the crisis in her life. She either lost, or held her sway over Allen Creston. This day must decide. If she lost—if she lost—a long sighing breath quivered through her lips. She sat in thought—her expressive eyes picturing each emotion of her heart—each passing thought.

XIII

Allen Creston sat alone in the library at Creston Lodge, writing courteous explanatory notes to all to whom invitations to the ball had been sent. He felt as if an incubus had dropped from his shoulders, and it was a relief that the ball was declared off. He had gone into the matter at first with a feeling of reluctance, fearing the Daverils would disapprove, but Colonel and Mrs. Barbee had presented the matter in such a practical, plausible, sensible way, he began to look at it from their standpoint, and his mercurial, boyish spirits rose at the prospect of excitement and gaiety.

He had kept his promise to Theodore. He had staid away from the Barbee home, and was closing out his business with Colonel Barbee as fast as possible. One morning Colonel Barbee and Mrs. Barbee drove over to Creston Lodge. They found Allen lonely and moody. He had just returned from a visit to

Tillie. She had been sweet and trusting, and Elsie was kind, but there was a chill in Ted's manner, and a stiffness in Mrs. Daveril's, that robbed his visits of the old-time pleasure.

Mrs. Barbee came in bright and smiling, ignoring Allen's defection.

They chatted pleasantly and gaily about current matters; then Mrs. Barbee approached the subject of the ball. Mrs. Barbee said:

"Mr. Creston, you should have entertained your neighbors on a lavish scale, on your coming of age, but you neglected to do so. Poor boy! there was no one to tell you. Every man needs a wife or a mother, Mr. Creston. Your mother and father would not have forgotten this duty to their neighbors, had they been living. Poor lonely boy!" and she sighed in a motherly way. "You are like a young brother to Colonel Barbee and me; we feel a deep interest in you, and we appreciate your kindness to us at a time when we most needed a friend. Now, the Colonel and I have thought it our duty to advise you in this matter. You are the richest man in the neighborhood; your family the oldest; and during your father's and grandfather's lifetime, the most influential—you see I am well posted on Brookside history. You have been the recip-

ient of countless courtesies from your neighbors and friends. Don't you think it looks a little—just a little—penurious to make no return?—pardon my plain speaking." Penurious! Big-hearted, generous Allen, penurious! Even Colonel Barbee covertly smiled at the word.

"Another thought!" continued Mrs. Barbee. "You and Colonel Barbee are about to dissolve your business connections. You are known and loved by all the neighborhood; we are strangers and aliens; we are misjudged—misunderstood. To sever your business relations in this sudden, abrupt way, will leave us under a cloud. Is that fair and kind to us, who are your true friends? I have been harshly criticised by these people; my life has been so different from theirs, they cannot understand me. Now, I have thought this: If we give this ball together—you, Colonel Barbee and I—here at Creston Lodge—your large billiard room is well adapted for dancing, and my poor little cottage home is too unpretentious for the master of Creston Lodge—it will say to the world—this little narrow Brookside world—that Allen Creston and the Barbees part friends. And we—the Colonel and I—will go on the 'even tenor of our way,'

with no added burden of distrust and suspicion to bear."

Her eyes, with a tinge of sadness in their dusky depths, looked into Allen's boyish, handsome face. To say no, to a woman, was an impossibility with Allen Creston. Deference and unfailing courtesy to women, came to him by inheritance and training. An early reproof of his father's had lingered with him through life: "Be a gentleman, boy! Be a gentleman! Be a rascal if you will, but, by heavens, be a gentleman!"

Allen wrote on. William came in and added fresh fuel to the blazing fire, and turned the wicks of the lamp higher.

"You gave my note to Mrs. Barbee, William?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Allen. There wasn't any answer, she said, sir," and William quietly withdrew.

Allen's thoughts were far away with the happier days of the future. Tillie's promise to marry him soon, had seemed the closing of a door upon a dark past, and the opening to a new life.

A gentle little tap upon the library door was unheeded, so intent was Allen upon his writ-

ing, and so wrapped in his thoughts. The door opened and Mrs. Barbee glided in. A subtle odor of tuberose, cloying, sweet—ah, how Allen hated the flower, and its perfume from that hour—stole upon his senses, and caused him to look up. A dark, radiantly beautiful face smiled into his, and, gowned in silk and laces, with flashing gems as if for a ball, Mrs. Barbee stood before him. He sprang to his feet and stood gazing in wrapt admiration upon the exquisite picture. The rounded shoulders gleamed white above the snowy meshes of lace, where diamonds, like "tangled fire-flies," glittered and flashed. One blood-red rose, like a crimson stain, lay upon her heaving breast; another rested in the raven strands of her hair; her dusky eyes softly glowed upon him.

Thus they stood in silence; then her low, careless, silvery laugh rang out:

"What think you, Sir Lancelot? That Guinevere stands before you? Nay; only a woman of the world, gowned for the ball of her fancy—the ball that 'might have been'—but for a rustic Elaine's silly jealousy!" Allen's face flushed, and his eyes flashed, but in a moment resumed their expression of tense admiration. "Do you think me mad? This is the last song

of the dying swan. The martyrs who died amid flames at the stake, knew no such anguish as mine. To possess a ball dress like this," and she held out the folds of shimmering silk, "and there be no ball to wear it to! Can you picture darker fate for woman? This gown has been wrapped for days in tissue paper, awaiting the ball. But tonight, I took it from its covering. I will wear it, I said, and go show Allen Creston how bravely I can bear defeat and disappointment. I come without one word of reproach, for I know the cruel thought was not yours—you would not needlessly wound a friendless, unhappy woman. But, ah! Allen! what is the jealous whim of a silly girl to the blighting of a woman's name? Your courtly, chivalrous manhood must rebel at being forced to stab an already wounded heart. If you give up the ball, do you not know what the gossips will say? You are a man, their flings cannot hurt you; but I—I must again go forth into the cold world, or suffer insulting ostracism. Good-bye. Some day, when our ways have drifted asunder, think of the woman in whose heart you planted an imperishable sting!"

"Mrs. Barbee, if I have wounded you—I have done what seemed best and right—if I have caused you pain—forgive me—"

Her sad, dark eyes looked full into his—she put out her little white, jeweled hands, and Allen clasped them in his own.

"Good-bye—good-bye—I am going now; but before I go, promise me, you will not thus stab me to the heart?"

That night William bore this note to Tillie:

"Dear Tillie: What you ask is impossible. To give up the ball, and have the cause become known—as everything does in this accursed place—will be to subject me to criticism, and make me the laughing-stock of the neighborhood. Bear with me yet a little while, Tillie, and trust me. Soon we will be married and all this horrible doubt, suspicion, and contention, will end. With love, ALLEN."

Tillie sat like one stunned.

Far into the night she sat, wrapped in brooding thought. When the grey lines of dawn began to color the night's dark sky, she wrote:

"Dear Leslie: You have told me so often of your love. If you come to me now, I may have a different answer for you. TILLIE."

XIV

An autumnal night, bathed in the soft, silvery glow of the Southern moon; the perfume of flowers upon the cool evening air.

With heart oppressed, burdened and lonely, Tillie wandered about the moonlit lawn. On the still air strains of music, wierd and sweet, stole softly through the woodlands from Creston Lodge, and lights glimmered fitfully through the trees. The ball was on at Creston Lodge. Tillie pressed her hand to her heart, and closed her eyes to keep back the tears. Too late Allen had come, with vows and promises, but she had not seen him, nor read his pleading letters. Within the house Arthur Thurston and Louie Graham were with Ted and Elsie, and their gay laughter floated out. That anyone could be merry! Would she ever laugh again in the old happy way?

There was the sound of wheels rolling down the road—the flash of twin lights at the gate—the clanging to of a carriage door, the crunch-

ing of gravel under a quick, firm tread, and Leslie Brentford's voice called softly from the gloom, "Tillie!" and he walked quickly over where her white form was silhouetted against the dark green foliage.

He gathered her in his arms, and looked into her face with the wrapt devotion an anchorite might bestow upon his patron saint. He bent to kiss her, but she placed one hand upon her lips, and his hot, fevered lips fell upon her cold, jeweled fingers.

He drew back, chilled and hurt.

"Tillie, have you sent for me only to torture me?"

She gave no reply, but looked into his brave, steadfast eyes. How his presence calmed and soothed her! He seemed so protecting—so all-sufficient—as if he could defy the very thunderbolts of Jove in shielding those whom he loved; his strong, vigorous, manly personality seemed a barrier against every evil. Surely—surely in time she would grow to love him as he should be loved.

"Did I seem slow in coming, Tillie? I was out of the city when your letter came."

"Yes, but I believed you would come."

"Believed I would come? Though death palsied my form, yet my soul would hear your

whispered call, and come back to say—I love you! I love you!''

Tillie looked with affright into his glowing, sublimated face, and drew back in pain and fear. She had sought to play with the eddying stream of a babbling brook, and a mountain torrent swept down and engulfed her. She swayed like the pine before the storm. She had sent for him, and now that he was come, what had she to give? Not one single little word of love. But he heeded not her silence—he was content that she permitted him to love her.

Conflicting emotions passed through the minds of the members of the Daveril family when they learned of Tillie's engagement to Leslie Brentford. Elsie was shocked and saddened, knowing Tillie had no heart to give. Theodore was relieved and jubilant, believing a woman's love a thing to grow and flourish under cultivation. He felt that Tillie's wounded heart would find a safe haven in Leslie's love, and that in time she would forget Allen.

Mrs. Daveril sighed and said: ''I hope it will be for your happiness, Tillie.''

Mr. Daveril felt that a mistake was being made, but he felt powerless to adjust matters.

All felt the charm of Leslie's personality, and in time began to think it would be all for the best. After a stay of two weeks Leslie said good-bye and returned to the city.

"I must go back to my work, Tillie; it has suffered from my long dallying here. Your mother has promised that you may spend the winter months in the City, with your aunt. I shall see you every day, then. Good-bye, until I come again, which will be soon, for I cannot stay long away from you, Tillie."

The week after the ball, Colonel Barbee died suddenly, of heart failure.

"Such a woman for luck!" was Tillie's sole comment.

Tillie went to the city for the winter season, and plunged into the vortex of society with much zest. Leslie Brentford was the most devoted and attentive of cavaliers, and left nothing undone that would contribute to her pleasure. Her social success, her beauty, the charm of her sparkling vivacity—all filled him with tender pride. But, had he not known the sterling quality of her character, the tenderness of her heart, doubts and fears would have

beset him when he saw her so besieged with admirers, and noted that she received their attentions with the pleasure and winning acceptance of a coquette.

The tender softness, the sweet freshness of the girl was being tinged with worldly aplomb, that gave an added charm and attraction, and if Tillie, on her first visit to the City, found herself popular, this second season crowned her a belle.

A jest was ever on her smiling, red lips, a brilliant sparkle in her eye, and the faint pink of the sea shell deepened to carmine in her rounded cheek.

One night at the opera she was one of a gay, and brilliant box party. Her soft shoulders rose round and white above her silken corsage, ropes of pearl encircled her neck, and in her gold-glinting hair gems flashed and glittered. About her stood men whose eyes spoke their admiration; by her side stood Leslie Brentford. Across the house Allen Creston sat, alone. He heard not one note of the music, nor saw one action of the play. His dark eyes were fixed with despairing, yearning gaze upon Tillie's beautiful, smiling face. She turned, and her eyes looked full into his—looked with the careless glance of

recognition; she smiled and bowed with infinite grace, then turned her bright face toward Leslie, who bent his head to catch her words, the light of love in his eyes. He turned toward Allen and bowed; then he and Tillie, with smiles and low-spoken words, turned their faces toward the stage.

The next day Allen's card was sent up to Tillie—the next day—and the next—but each call found her not at home, or engaged. Allen left the city for travel through the North and East.

"Leslie, I'm growing cold, hard and worldly," said Tillie, one day. "I must—

'—quit a world where strong temptations try,
And since 'tis hard to combat, learn to fly.'

"I must go home and freshen up my mora nature—home to those—

'Dear, lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, where every sport could please.' "

"I will let you go, Tillie, but remember you are to come to me with the roses of June, never to leave me again."

When the cold, cutting winds of March swept through the bare trees, and over the bleak fields and meadows, Tillie went home.

XV

Tillie had come home with a sparkle in her eye, and the flush of health upon her cheek, delighting her family and friends with her buoyant spirits. The old days seemed almost to have come back again, though there was one form absent from the circle—one name that was never spoken.

"So, Elsie, you and Arthur are to be married at last, in the Summer. Arthur has waited for you as patiently, and almost as long, as Jacob waited for Rachel. I am glad he has such a fine, remunerative practice, and I'm sure a happy, contented future awaits you both." Then turning to blushing Louie—"And Ted and Louie—you two quarreling children—to think you are engaged!"

"I had it to do, Tillie; had it to do," said Ted, in low, mysterious tones. "Some careless words of mine, lightly spoken, she took seriously, and threatened me with a breach of promise suit."

"Ted!" and Louie looked as if about to cry, and turned her blushing, pouting face away from Ted's smiling, conciliating eyes.

"Louie, didn't you know I was teasing?"

"Oh, Ted, if you and Louie are going to get sentimental, go out in the fresh air. I can endure your chaff and nonsense, but your love-making is stifling. And do try to do all your quarreling before marriage. I don't see how you two are ever going to agree!" And Tillie laughed at the changed manner of Ted and Louie—she gentle and docile, he tender and deferential.

Allen Creston was home from his travels. A note came to Tillie from him, asking to see her, but neither message nor answer went back.

The excitement of dissipation removed, Tillie's high spirits suddenly collapsed, and like the blowing out of a candle, the light and sparkle left her eye, and her cheeks paled, and she seemed but a frail shadow of the blooming girl flushed with health. She moved listlessly and wearily about. Frailer and frailer she grew, alarming and saddening her family.

"Tillie, you are pale; are you sick?" asked Mrs. Daveril, troubled and alarmed at the

sudden change in the girl. Tillie had never been sick in her life.

"No, mamma, only tired. I dissipated too much all winter; I danced too much, and now I'm paying the piper." She tried to be merry and gay, and the effort was but an added strain upon her weakened nerves.

When Leslie came, he looked long and earnestly into her pale face, with the shadows under the sweet, tender eyes.

"Tillie, what have they been doing to you? Where are your roses gone to?"

"I am lazy, Leslie; I will be myself again, soon." But she grew paler and frailer.

Doctor Thurston was consulted.

"Over-wrought nerves, Tillie; you have put an iron restraint upon them, my girl, and now they threaten to snap," and he looked very tenderly into the girl's pale face. "You must be very quiet, very natural, very cheerful, and lazy, Tillie, and you will come around all right, soon." But Doctor Thurston was less hopeful than his words implied, for "who can minister to a mind diseased;" and he knew no physician's skill could heal the wounds in a woman's heart.

Again Leslie came from the City and found Tillie paler, thinner, frailer, more listless than on his former visit.

"Tillie, dear little love, what is the matter? Why are you like this?" and a shadow of pain fell upon his face.

"I don't know, Leslie. I am not sick; I have no pain, but I am tired—tired all the time; it is an effort to move; I only want to sit still, or lie idly in a hammock, out under the green trees." Then, in soft, low tones, "Leslie, I promised to marry you in June, but you will not want so pale and weary a bride. You will wait until the autumn days come again,

'When the maple turns to crimson,
And the sassafras is gold;
When the gentian's in the meadow,
And the aster on the wold.' "

He took the little wasted white hand in his, and said, in a voice as soft and tender as a mother's, as he looked with love filled eyes into her face:

"Yes, Tillie, I want you; I want to take you to Europe, and the sea breeze and travel will bring back health and strength."

"No—no, Leslie! dear friend!" he winced at the word. "Please wait—until autumn."

With a sigh, and in a low, tense voice, "It shall be as you wish, Tillie."

Leslie was much alarmed about Tillie, and went to Mrs. Daveril, saying:

"You must take her away; take her to the sea shore."

Leslie, Mrs. Daveril, Elsie and Tillie went to the coast. But Tillie soon tired of the wild roar of the ocean. Her overwrought nerves quailed at the sad, surging sound, and she longed for the placid quiet of her country home.

"The murmur of the sea saddens me, Leslie," she said. "Like little Paul Dombey, I sit and listen and wonder 'what are the wild waves saying?' and it is like seeking to know the mysteries of the human heart—no answer comes—only, ever that sad, restless murmur."

Then to the mountains they went, seeking health and strength for the fading girl.

But Tillie complained wearily, that the mountains awed and oppressed her.

"I am such a tiny human atom, and they are so awful and grand, they seem about to fall on me, and crush me. I seem to stand on the very brink of eternity."

Leslie was very patient with her nervous fancies; unfailingly tender and gentle, humor-

ing every whim. When she expressed a wish to go home, they returned at once.

Day by day, Tillie became thinner, frailer, quieter, more listless.

She and Leslie were alone in the library. He looked long and intently into the girl's sad eyes; he noted the pallor of the face, with the blue tracings of the veins outlined under the delicate skin. He took one fragile little hand in his, and held it in silence.

His face was set, hard and cold as granite, but his eye glowed and burned like a flame.

"Tillie!" his voice was husky, tense and low. "Tillie! you loved Allen Creston once."

A little gasp—a pressure of the hand upon the heart, and Tillie's eyes fell before his burning, steady gaze.

"Tillie!" low, sad and slow, with searching look into the girl's face, "have you ever ceased to love him?"

"No, Leslie," faintly whispered.

A sigh, a groan from Leslie, then silence.

"Tillie, you are breaking your heart for him," at last Leslie spoke. "Dear love, you are dearer than my life—your happiness more to me than my own. Dearest, no chains of mine shall cut into your sweet heart. My little wounded bird, your fluttering wings shall

not beat against the bars of a gilded cage. You are free, Tillie, but I am bound by links that eternity cannot sever. Through life—through eternity—I will love you ever.'' His face was ghastly as death, and Tillie was like a broken lily.

''Leslie—Leslie!'' sobbing. ''Forgive me! If I have deceived you, or wounded you, forgive me. You are so true, so noble—my wounded heart, my stung pride turned to you for comfort. I thought in time I would learn to love you as you deserve to be loved. Forgive me, Leslie!''

''Dear love, I have naught to forgive. For months you have been mine—I have been near you—that remembrance will solace me through the long years of a lonely life. Now I have but one wish—to see you well, and happy.''

In the hall at Creston Lodge, Leslie Brentford and Allen Creston stood facing each other.

''Mr. Creston, you are wondering why I have intruded upon you. You knew of my engagement to Miss Daveril? That engage-

ment is now at an end. You can make such use of the knowledge as you see fit."

Allen's eyes glowed, the color rushed into his face, he threw his head proudly erect.

"Mr. Brentford, do you mean to imply there is yet hope—for me?"

"Ask that question of Miss Daveril. A positive answer from her would be better than a surmise from me."

"Allen! Allen!" Tillie was sobbing on his breast. "My love is greater than my pride—greater than my life."

Allen looked into the pale, beautiful face, as if he could never tear his eyes away. Love, sorrow, joy, overpowered him. Tillie his again! Tillie, whom he thought he had lost forever!

"Tillie, no cloud shall ever come between us again. Soon you will be my little merry Tillie once more, with the roses in your cheek, and we will be happy—you and I, Tillie."

"Yes, Allen, we will be happy, if that dark shadow never comes between us again; but if she does—it must be good-bye forever—though it kill me. We would part forever—no word could bring me back again."

Happiness was a magic elixir to Tillie. The pink of the wild rose bloomed again in her cheek, the smiles played about her red lips, a soft light beamed from her blue grey eye.

One day she felt well and strong—almost like the Tillie of old. She walked alone down the shady road that ran by Creston Lodge. On and on she went. What if Allen should be at the gate! How surprised and pleased he would be! Buoyed up by this thought, she walked on, slowly, for her strength was ebbing. Almost at the gate. Each step was an effort, but she would sit there and rest, on the big stone step at the gate. Ah, she was there now! Looking up, she saw Mrs. Barbee seated on the stone step, and standing before her—Allen!

Like a dumb-stricken animal, Tillie gazed into his horror-widened eyes. One sad, pleading, reproachful look, such as a fawn might turn upon one who stabbed it to the heart, and Tillie went mournfully homeward.

"Tillie! Tillie!" the cry was like the wail of a lost and tortured soul; "Tillie!" pain-racked and anguished.

But Tillie looked not back, only waved her hand, as might one who stood aboard a shore-

receding ship, sailing on a boundless and unknown sea.

Tillie walked erect and proudly, until a curve of the road carried her beyond view; then her pride relaxed, and a weakness, as of death, overcame her. Her feet seemed balls of lead that her frail body refused to drag along. Her heart beat and fluttered; a dreamy faintness came over her, and she sank upon the green earth, unconscious. Thus Ted found her a moment later when he rode up. Quickly dismounting, and throwing the bridle on the horse's neck, he lifted Tillie in his arms.

XVI

"Elsie, Allen and Mrs. Barbee are to be married!" Theodore's face was drawn and haggard; the merry, boyish look was quite gone. Elsie looked up in quick surprise; her eyes dilated and her face paled.

"Oh, Ted, it can't be true?"

"Yes, it is true."

Elsie pressed her hand over her eyes, as if to shut out some horrible vision.

"Oh, Ted, it will break Tillie's heart!" and Elsie sank, sobbing, into a chair.

"Her heart is already broken, Elsie."

"Then this will kill her."

"That Tillie should break her heart over this villian!" muttered Theodore, through his white lips. "The sting of it to me is that I cannot touch him, because it would hurt Tillie. That I must see her fade—fade—see her bright life go out under this cloud of sorrow, and yet keep my hands from his vile throat!" and Theodore clenched his fists, and bit his teeth deep into his white lip, until a

scarlet stain sprang upon it, while he walked with restless step back and forth.

"I could tear his black heart from his breast! But for Tillie—for Tillie's sake I must sit like a spiritless dolt. It is hard, Elsie—hard to see her fading day by day, and he in the insolence of manhood."

"Poor Tillie! Poor Allen! Think how we once loved him, Ted; how we were children together. He was kind, and gentle, and good; his heart was tender and noble. We were so happy—he loved us—he was true until he fell under the curse of that awful, awful woman's influence."

"He was warned, Elsie; he went headlong to his doom with eyes wide open."

"Ted, we must not let Tillie know. No one must tell her—the shock might be fatal. Doctor Thurston says her heart is affected—she grows weaker each day."

Elsie and Ted put their arms about each other, and both burst into tears.

One day Tillie lay upon a lounge in the wide, cool hall. Ted was by her side—he seldom left her, now—holding one little thin, white hand in his. Tillie was very pale and fragile, but a smile was upon the brave, curved lip.

"Teddy, dear Teddy!" caressing his curling blonde locks. "Elsie!" as she heard Elsie's footfall. "Come here, dear." Elsie came and knelt by her side.

"What, dearest?"

"Elsie, I want to go once more to the old school house grounds, and sit again under the old oak, just as we used to long, long years ago, when we were children—such happy children! I want to go today—you and Ted, and I and Allen!"

Tomorrow was Allen's wedding day!

Ted and Elsie looked in quick alarm into each others' blanched faces, and tears sprang to their eyes.

"Dearest," said Elsie, tenderly—so tenderly, "do you think you are strong enough?"

"Yes; Ted will take me, won't you, Teddy boy?" patting the strong hand that held hers. The tears almost blinded him, and his voice was choked and husky, as he answered:

"Yes, Tillie; yes, darling. But you don't want Allen, do you, Tillie?"

"Yes, Ted. Let us have Allen—for the last time. Tomorrow is his wedding day." Ted and Elsie looked up quickly. "Let us go and say good-bye to him."

Brave heart! She had known, and yet had given no sign; had been merry and gay in a way it broke their hearts to see, that their sorrow might be no keener.

"When do you want to go, Tillie?" asked Elsie, softly.

"This afternoon, late—when the sun is getting low in the west, and the beams fall through the trees, making shadows on the grass, just as they used to when we raced down the hill from school."

"You shall go, Tillie," and Ted's voice was tender as a mother's when she soothes a weary child to sleep.

"You and Leslie—dear, dear Leslie—will take me. I am too tired and lazy to walk, and it is too near to ride—just down the road a bit—across the brook, and up the hill! Send Leslie and Louie to me, Elsie. I hear their voices in the yard."

Elsie and Ted left her with Leslie and Louie.

"Ted—oh, Ted—what shall we do? Will Allen go, do you think?"

"He must—he shall!"

"I will go over to Creston Lodge and see him, Ted. And—Ted—if he goes, we must be very kind and gentle, and say no word that will wound Tillie. Let this last hour in the

old play grounds be—if not happy—at least free from fresh wounds."

In response to Elsie's quick, nervous ring at Creston Lodge, Allen came to the door.

At sight of Elsie, pale and breathless, his dark eyes grew wild and staring, and his face tense, drawn and pallid.

"Elsie—Tillie?" A tremor shook his strong frame like an aspen leaf.

"Allen!" Elsie could say no more, but burst into tears. He lead her gently to a chair, and stood looking down upon her with sad, questioning gaze.

He tried to speak, but no word came through his nerveless, pallid lips. She was come to tell him Tillie was dead—he had heard she was not well, not strong.

"Allen, Tillie is ill—so ill—she may leave us any moment—and, Allen, she has asked to go once more to the old school house grounds —with Ted, and me, and you, Allen."

"Me?" A groan, and he buried his face in his hands. "Oh! God! Sweet, forgiving Tillie! Not me, Elsie, not me!"

"Yes, she wants to say good-bye. She knows tomorrow is your wedding day."

An ashy pallor swept over Allen's face.

"Will Theodore go—if I go?"

"Ted would die for Tillie, Allen!"

"Oh, Elsie, so would I—to give her health, happiness—to bring back the merry, laughing Tillie of the old happy days—I would die! Die! What is my accursed life that I should prize it? What has it been but a shadow over the sweetest, truest soul that ever brightened a weary world! Die! It is the one prayer my impious lips may yet utter—to die!"

"Oh, Allen," sobbed Elsie, "you had but to live, true to yourself, and her, to give her happiness. You failed—but that is past recall. If she forgives, we—her family—must try to forget."

"Elsie—not beyond recall—not beyond recall!" and the words rang wild and wailing from an anguished heart. "Never again a hope—I have clung to hope—it alone has kept me from suicide. Every step upon the gravel I have thought—'it is a message from Tillie'—her tender heart relents—she is sorry—she will see me—she still loves me—she will forgive all—my little Tillie, my sweet, sweet Tillie! These thoughts, these hopes, have surged through my brain, day by day—hour by hour—"

"Oh, Allen! my poor boy! you deceive yourself. Tillie's feet are too near the other

shore for her to have thought or care for earthly hopes. And, Allen, have you known her all these years to so little purpose that you can think that, though she might forgive, and still love you, any power could persuade her to accept a dishonored faith? Were you willing to break your troth with the woman who has betrayed your soul, neither angels nor man could persuade Tillie to cast one stain upon the spotless purity of her own honor—to win happiness in such a way. Allen, you cast away a pearl. Allen, you will come?"

"Yes, Elsie."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Elsie turned for one last look.

Despair and grief were written upon Allen's set, palled face. The portraits of his ancestors looked down from the oaken walls, upon this last scion of a goodly race. He looked up into his father's pictured face, and seemed to see a look of brooding sadness in the dark eyes. He had loved little Tillie.

One last look at the lonely man, and Elsie, with tears streaming down her cheeks, turned and went out the door — she felt as if she left the house of the dead.

That afternoon, Tillie, looking like a dainty cameo, in her white dress, walked out on the gallery, pale and fragile, unlike the blooming Tillie of a year ago, but sweet and beautiful in a pure, ethereal way.

All rose at her coming, and met her with smiles and bows. Leslie came forward and placed a chair for her, saying:

"Now, little Princess, sit here, in this arm-chair. Now, Ted, steady!" and the two men gently lifted the chair with its light burden, walking slowly, carefully, down the steps, down the walk, and out into the road, Elsie and Louie and Doctor Thurston following, then Mr. Daveril and Mrs. Daveril, with slow steps and sad faces.

"Quite a triumphal march," said Tillie, looking back, waving her wan hand, and laughing gayly.

"We've always been your loving followers, Tillie," said Louie, with an effort to be merry.

The chair was gently lowered, under the old oak tree, where she had played so often as a child.

Doctor Thurston held a glass of wine to her lips.

"Now, Arthur, is this served in a social or professional capacity? If the latter, I decline

the dose; if the former, I drink your good health, my lords and ladies! I drink, and wish for you all—happiness!

"Dear old tree!" looking upward, "'neath your leafy branches may I sleep when 'life's fitful fever is o'er.'"

For a moment a sad silence fell upon the little group, until broken by a gay jest and merry laugh from Tillie.

Then all went away and left the brother and sisters alone. All but Leslie. He lingered, holding Tillie's hand in his, and looking tenderly into her face.

"Tillie—some day—somewhere—dear heart, you may say, what my soul has hungered and thirsted to hear—Leslie, I love you."

"Leslie—kind, true friend—I said that to but one man, and I said it for all eternity."

With a sigh and a yearning look, Leslie walked away to the foot of the hill.

Tillie began to talk brightly of the old days.

"It was here, Ted, we made Mr. Davis throw off that load of sand," and she laughed merrily.

"We—oh, listen at that, Elsie!" said Ted. "'We,' when I was mum as a mouse, and expected to be hung, drawn and quartered!"

"But Tillie was not afraid," said Elsie, tenderly.

"No, never afraid! and not now afraid!" musingly.

A hush fell upon them, as Allen came up and stood before them.

"Allen!" with a tremor of joy and sadness in her voice, and a long searching look into his face, the tears sprang to Tillie's eyes. How changed he was—how old—how worn and haggard—as if the storms of years had swept over him, leaving him a stranded wreck upon life's desolate shore. He stood looking down into her pale, wan, but beautiful face.

"Tillie!" the word was a cry, a moan.

Then she smiled up into his face, bravely, through her tears.

"Sit down, Allen, and let us talk of the old days, and say good-bye to the past, and welcome in the new life—your new life that begins tomorrow with your bridal. May you be very, very happy, Allen. And, Allen, may your life be all that your father could have wished it to be. You and Ted, Allen, for my sake—for the sake of the sweet past—must be friends. Teddy, shake hands with Allen."

Allen looked searchingly into Theodore's clouded face. As if it were the wresting of soul from body, Theodore extended his hand and clasped Allen's. Tillie, looking anxiously into

the two gloomy faces, sighed. Again Allen turned his eyes upon her sweet face.

Then, throwing away, in the wild delirium of a despairing hope, every restraint, every vow, every tie that shackled him to a loathsome present, he threw himself upon his knees before the girl he loved, and grasped her hands in his.

"Tillie! Tillie! Tillie! Come back to me, from the verge of the grave! Come back and bless my darkened life—Beloved! beloved! my ruined life and my starved heart—cry out for you, and will not be stifled! Tillie! Sweet Tillie!"

Theodore, at Allen's first wild words, sprang to his feet, his eyes alert; then, as the torrent of words swept on, with the fury of a caged lion he sprang upon Allen and grasped him by the arm.

"You coward! You insult my sister!"

"Allen!" Tillie's voice, clear and sweet, rang out; then her head fell back against the chair.

"Ted! Allen! Look!" screamed Elsie. "Tillie! Oh, God! she is dead!"

Dead—with a smile upon her sweet face, and Allen's name upon her lips.

For an instant the three stood in dumb, stricken horror, looking at the beautiful, lifeless form.

Then Theodore, with the wild, fierce rage of a tiger, fell upon Allen Creston and clutched him by the throat.

"Now, Allen Creston, you and I will have our reckoning!"

"Oh, Theodore! Theodore! are you mad, my poor, poor boy?" and Elsie's feeble hands clutched at his iron arms. "Theodore, for Tillie's sake—not in the presence of the dead!" Theodore's hands dropped by his side, and he swooned upon the grass.

Leslie had come running up at the first wild scream from Elsie, quickly followed by the others.

Pushing them all roughly aside, Leslie gathered Tillie's cold, lifeless form in his arms, and bore her home.

"Mine! Mine! All mine!" he crooned, in the delirium of despairing agony, looking down into the beautiful face. But he pressed no kiss upon the smiling lips. He would not take in death what she in life had denied.

Allen, like a bowed and aged man, groped his lonely way to his desolate home.

The summer moon floated high in the midnight sky. All nature was wrapped in soft, weird beauty.

Within the house Tillie, smiling and beautiful, rested in her last sweet sleep. By her side, his sad eyes upon her face, Leslie Brentford sat through the long hours of the night.

Without, on the old school house play grounds, Theodore Daveril, in the wild agony of grief, walked alone in frenzied restlessness, struggling to quell the demon of murder that was battling within him.

Down the moonlit road came the quick tramp of a horse's feet, and black Lee, wet and white with foam, flecked with crimson, where the cruel spurs had gashed into his side, dashed like a mad, wild thing, with his rider urging him on to greater speed. Like a spectre in the pale moonlight, Allen Creston sat upon his frenzied horse as if carved of stone, his pallid face rigid, and the light of madness in his burning, anguished eyes.

Theodore sprang out just as Lee's feet splashed into the water. The horse plunged and reared, and threw its rider over against the red-brown rock that jutted into the stream. Allen's head fell against a sharp point of the rock; the red blood gushed from his temple, and trickled down and mingled with the crystal water of the brook. White and still, in the moonlight he lay. The frenzied, riderless horse dashed down the road, clanking the stirrups against its sides.

One moment Theodore stood looking down upon his prostrate foe. God's hand had avenged Tillie! But he—he was a murderer in God's sight! One wild, fierce spasm of the joy of revenge flashed over him. Then—then the pity—the sadness of it all swept like a blighting wave over his grief-laden heart, and stooping down by the white, still form, he took the cold, dead hand in his.

"For Tillie's sake! For Tillie's sake!"

Tillie! Sweet Tillie! When the moonlight glints upon the marble shaft above thy grave, under the old oak tree; and the green blades

of the corn whir and rustle in the cool evening breeze; and the gurgling of the brook, rippling o'er the white pebbles, blends with the echoing song of the whip-poor-will, the past rises like a spectre. Again, sweet Tillie, thy merry laugh seems to ring out, and thy form, in brightness and beauty, seems again to tread the uplands and glades. Then the past—the happy past—comes like a dream, and the heart grows full to bursting.

Tillie! Sweet Tillie!

"Through the smoke of burning summer,
When the weary wings are still,
I can see her in the valley,
I can hear her on the hill,
In the splendor of the woodlands,
In the whisper of the rill.

"For the shores of earth and Heaven
Meet and mingle in the blue;
She can wander down the glory,
To the places that she knew,
Where the happy lovers wandered,
In the days when life was true."

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